

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: 'She Will Not Submit to Be Ignored': Kate Douglas Wiggin and Performing American Femininity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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“‘She Will Not Submit to Be Ignored’: Kate Douglas Wiggin and Performing American Femininity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century” seeks not only to reintroduce Wiggin as an important American figure of her era, but to do so as an example of the complex restructuring of women’s roles in early twentieth-century American culture via the public performance of self. This dissertation explores how Wiggin performed her different personae throughout her life, how she shifted between the different roles she personified, and how the fluctuation of the definition of “appropriate” feminine behavior affected when and how she performed. The multiple facets of Kate Douglas Wiggin's public personae have never received scholarly attention; this examination offers an ideal opportunity to simultaneously reinvigorate interest in her work and to develop scholarship based on theories of self-representation and performance. By defining and explicating a theory of the performance of self based on discrete acts of self expression, I open the door for scholars in theatre, performance studies, literature, history, and gender studies to re-

interrogate and renegotiate previously held conceptions of women's roles in society in general and within the theatrical sphere in particular.

**‘SHE WILL NOT SUBMIT TO BE IGNORED’: KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN AND  
PERFORMING AMERICAN FEMININITY AT THE TURN OF THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY**

By

Carrie Jane Cole

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## Introduction: “Not quite content to be put by”<sup>1</sup>: Performing Public Persona as a Recuperative Process

In 1897, international business tycoon George C. Riggs sent a sample of his wife’s handwriting to an expert for analysis. The sample revealed, among other things, that Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923) would “not submit to be ignored.”<sup>2</sup> This characterization of Wiggin, an established performer on the lecture circuit and advocate for early childhood education, and well on her way to a notable career as a children’s author, opposes the conventional and accepted image of a woman renowned for her highly traditional and sentimental portrait of young womanhood in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, which would secure her international celebrity in 1903. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Wiggin’s character lies in its central paradox—the passion of a woman who would not be ignored juxtaposed with a public persona that is easily circumscribed by the confines of the nineteenth century Cult of True Womanhood, a cult that held sway over the appropriate conduct of women from the time of her birth in 1856 but had waned significantly by her death in 1923.<sup>3</sup> Despite the growing Suffrage movement and other opportunities for public advocacy open to women of the era, Wiggin crafted a role for herself that appeared to conform to the tenets of “proper” feminine conduct as espoused by the numerous conservative

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<sup>1</sup> James Branch Cabell, quoted in Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *My Garden of Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 436.

<sup>2</sup> The analyst’s letter is reprinted in Nora Archibald Smith’s *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 286.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Welter, in her seminal essay, argues that while none of the conduct writers of the era truly define the term “Cult of True Womanhood,” there was no mistaking that, “in a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found.” See Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151-74.

etiquette manuals aimed at middle-class women.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, Wiggin publicly performed an iteration of middle-class sensibility and respectability that allowed her to solidify an identity position within the shifting social structure that epitomized middle-class America at the end of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, and from that same embedded identity position, she fought for education reform and community preservation.

“‘She Will Not Submit to Be Ignored’: Kate Douglas Wiggin and Performing American Femininity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century” seeks not only to reintroduce Wiggin as an important American figure of her era, but to do so as an example of the complex restructuring of women’s roles in early twentieth-century American culture via the public performance of self. This dissertation explores how Wiggin performed her different personae throughout her life, how she shifted between the different roles she personified, and how the fluctuation of the definition of “appropriate” feminine behavior affected when and how she performed. The multiple facets of Kate Douglas Wiggin's public personae have never received scholarly attention; this examination offers an ideal opportunity to simultaneously reinvigorate interest in her work and to develop scholarship based on theories of self-representation and performance. By defining and explicating a theory of the performance of self based on discrete acts of self-expression, I open the door for scholars in theatre, performance studies, literature, history, and gender studies to re-

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Halttunen, in *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study in Middle-Class Culture in America 1830-1879* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), points to over seventy American etiquette manuals published between 1830 and 1860 as indicative of the middle-class absorption in performing appropriate public behavior.

interrogate and renegotiate previously held conceptions of women's roles in society in general and within the theatrical sphere in particular.

In order to more fully understand the extent to which ideas and ideals of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century femininity contributed to Wiggin's public behavior and acts of self-expression, issues of class and of women's position in the public sphere must also be acknowledged. Several scholars have explored the impact of the solidification of the middle-class in the nineteenth century and its control and idea of culture, but with scant examination of the performance of culture and the specific roles women played in the social world. Two notable works on the era are Laurence Levine's *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* and John F. Kasson's *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*. While Levine's text is not particularly focused on in women's roles, both Levine and Kasson assert that nineteenth-century culture was based on the dominance of a growing middle class that defined itself so rigidly that it inherently undermined any criticism of society through its "tendency to equate the notion of culture with that of hierarchy so that to examine closely the manner in which the hierarchy of culture was created...was translated almost inevitably into an attack on the idea of culture itself."<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, I would argue that it is the combination of Wiggin's mediation of this cultural hierarchy, her social mobility within the American middle class, and the changing perception of women's roles and what constituted "propriety" at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century that created the personas by which she defined herself.

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<sup>5</sup> Laurence Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 7. See also John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

The few critical studies undertaken on Wiggin in recent years have focused primarily on Wiggin as a children's author, either as the creator of a specific work, such as *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, or as part of a group of turn-of-the-century female authors with roots in New England who were noted for their idyllic treatment of life in the region. The most recent works that study Wiggin only explore her work as author; Lin Haire-Sargeant's 2004 dissertation, "American Girl to New Woman: Themes of Transformation in Books for Girls, 1850-1925" focuses primarily on *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, while Robert Michael Pugh's "A Thorn in the Text: Shakerism and the Marriage Narrative" contains a similar type of social literary critique.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, most references to Wiggin and her work take the form of short narrative biographies. Many scholars simply place Wiggin among a host of other regional female authors, as in Laura Benét's *Famous Storytellers for Young People* (1968) and Frederic Taber Cooper's *Some American Story Tellers* (1911, 1968).<sup>7</sup>

The only extensive biographical studies of Wiggin are her own *My Garden of Memory*, published shortly after her death in 1923 and her sister's *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her*, written just two years later.<sup>8</sup> No significant biographical study has attempted to contextualize Wiggin and her work within the social world in which she operated at the turn of the twentieth century. In this dissertation, I argue that it was Wiggin's construction of her embodied public persona that helped secure popularity with an audience that identified with her struggle to

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<sup>6</sup> Lin Haire-Sargeant, "American Girl to New Woman: Themes of Transformation in Books for Girls, 1850-1925" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 2004); Robert Michael Pugh, "A Thorn in the Text: Shakerism and the Marriage Narrative" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Laura Benét, *Famous Storytellers for Young People* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1968); Frederic Taber Cooper, *Some American Story Tellers* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911, rpt.).

<sup>8</sup> For a chronology of Wiggin's life and work, please refer to the Appendix of this text.

maintain what she referred to as “scattered interests—my household duties, my music, my social obligations, my girl students, my friends”—in the face of tumultuous changes in the public role of women in America of the era.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, I would further argue that her performance of a persona that incorporated so many of these “scattered interests” simultaneously was a product of the era to such an extent that just two years after her death, her sister, editor, and occasional co-author, Nora Archibald Smith, had difficulty convincing Houghton Mifflin Company, Wiggin’s publisher, that a biography of Wiggin would have an audience. The publisher predicted that Wiggin’s following was akin to a cult of personality, and, without her presence, Wiggin’s popularity would quickly dissipate.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars who have deviated from focusing on Wiggin as an author have instead concentrated on her role as an early education advocate and reformer, and include her in brief summaries of the kindergarten movement in America, as can be seen in Barbara Peltzman’s *Pioneers of Early Childhood Education: A Bio-bibliographical Guide*.<sup>11</sup> Yet the interest in Wiggin as an educator remained relatively minor after her death, with a slight peak in the early 1980s, in work such as Carol Marie Roland’s *The California Kindergarten Movement: A Study in Class and Social Feminism* and Lois Rather’s *Miss Kate: Kate Douglas Wiggin in San Francisco*.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Wiggin's kindergarten reform is discussed in two more recent doctoral works. In Catherine Boyce’s “Parenting Advice to Immigrants, 1889-

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *New York Times* (New York), 5 April 1902.

<sup>10</sup> Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, to Nora Archibald Smith, n.d. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Peltzman, *Pioneers of Early Childhood Education: A Bio-bibliographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Carol Marie Roland, *The California Kindergarten Movement: A Study in Class and Social Feminism* (Riverside: University of California, Riverside, 1980); Lois Rather, *Miss Kate: Kate Douglas Wiggin in San Francisco* (Oakland, CA: Rather Press, 1980).

1916: Settlement House Leaders and Kindergartners” (2005), Wiggin and her work with the Silver Street Kindergarten in San Francisco are discussed in relation to the kindergarten movement’s position in the tension between immigrants’ cultural identity and assimilation.<sup>13</sup> In Carolyn Ann Christensen Saba’s 2000 dissertation, “Early Progressive Educational Reform: The Kindergarten and Industrial Education Movement in the United States from 1875 to 1890,” Saba cites Wiggin as one of the early pioneers of kindergarten reform; however, her sole source in her section on Wiggin is *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin’s own recollection of her life and work.<sup>14</sup>

These disparate viewpoints on Wiggin’s works present carefully selected and discrete pieces of the picture of her life and work that fall short of encompassing the complexity of the many vocations and avocations she embraced; they fail to make the connection between her writing, her biography, and her educational philosophy, and how she represented herself both within and through these contexts. I make that connection by looking at Wiggin’s life and work in the context of performance and play and argue that it is only through the analysis of these as acts of self-expression that these connections become clearly and easily distinguishable.

## **Theoretical and Methodological Concerns**

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<sup>13</sup> Catherine Boyce, “Parenting Advice to Immigrants, 1889--1916: Settlement House Leaders and Kindergartners” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2005). Boyce’s bibliography contains no citations of any of Wiggin’s numerous treatises on kindergartens, and indicates that her primary source material for Wiggin’s work is the biography *Kate Douglas Wiggin, as Her Sister Knew Her*, by Nora Archibald Smith.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Ann Christenson Saba, “Early Progressive Educational Reform: The Kindergarten and Industrial Education Movements in the United States from 1875 to 1890” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland College Park, 2000).

Erving Goffman's *Performance in Everyday Life* and *Frame Analysis*, along with the works of leading theorists in autobiographical studies, including Laura Marcus, James Olney, Sidonie Smith, and Martha Watson, form the basis of my theoretical frame. Goffman's enormously influential work offers key constructs for interrogating identity performance and impression management. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman acknowledges the continuum within which people develop a performance of self, noting that "at one extreme, one finds the performer can be fully taken in by his own act" and "at the other extreme, we find that the performer may not be taken in at all by his own routine."<sup>15</sup> While Goffman does acknowledge that the performance of self is never fixed on this continuum, I find for the purposes of this study that his delineation of terms falls short of the descriptive means necessary to examine Wiggins and the varied and distinctive performances she created. However, what is particularly useful in Goffman's work is his understanding of the machinations involved in the performance of self, and that "the whole machinery of self-production is cumbersome...and sometimes breaks down, exposing its separate components."<sup>16</sup> It is in the moments that the machinery breaks that a person must resort to what Goffman refers to as "impression management"; that is, "the common techniques that persons employ to sustain...impressions" during encounters with others.<sup>17</sup> However, Goffman enters the critical conversation from a sociological point of view, employing theatrical vocabulary that is circumscribed by the social events and functions he wishes to study. His work establishes the person-as-performer in terms of the perceived audience's interaction with the performer's

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<sup>15</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

*front*, “that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Goffman’s work provides a context for examining how the performer and the audience react to deviance from that front.

In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman extends his study of the presentation of self in everyday life beyond the self-being-performed to include the context within which that performance occurs. While Goffman examines that context to a small degree through natural frameworks, in which “no willful agency causally and intentionally interferes...no actor continuously guides the outcome,” it is his theory of social frameworks that heavily inform my work.<sup>19</sup> For Goffman, social frameworks “provide the background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency” of a person’s attempts at impression management.<sup>20</sup> To a large extent, the chapter structure that follows is defined by various social frameworks within which Wiggin created public personae to exert her agency, thus not only establishing the previously mentioned distinct performances in the face of socio-cultural demands, but also affording opportunities to analyze the synthesis of her performances of social roles that are so often examined as discrete entities.

I find it useful for the purposes of this analysis to turn to current studies of autobiographical theory to complement Goffman’s analysis. In particular, the work of the past decade that fuses identity politics, feminist theory, and autobiographical

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>19</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



discourse together informs this work. Building on the work of such scholars as Judith Butler, who, in *Gender Trouble*, argues that the construction of identity “is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated,” autobiographical theorists have developed strategies of investigation that allow for the agency of autobiographical construction that expand the definition of autobiography beyond the traditional “Great Men” format that “served to exclude forms of ‘life-writing’ such as diaries, letters and journals.”<sup>21</sup> By expanding the definition of autobiography in this manner, theorists have opened areas of evidence that heretofore have been discounted, and have built upon what Sidonie Smith refers to as the nineteenth century’s “preoccupation with autobiographical writing,” acknowledging that the expanded definition of the autobiographical act allowed women in particular to “use autobiography to assert their participation in the culture’s celebration of the universal subject with its ideology of human possibility, desire, and meaning.”<sup>22</sup> It is within this framework of autobiographical determination that I contend Wiggin actively participated in the creation of her own identity and meaning.

In my analysis of Wiggin’s life, I model a theoretical framework that theatre artists and cultural historians will be able to use to examine the extent to which role-playing is self-determined or imposed. The implications are far-reaching when considering whether turn-of-the-century women actually had agency to choose and pursue their own life roles or whether and when society imposed those roles. In

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 187. Laura Marcus, *Autobiographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women’s Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 25.

addition, the framework allows access to discovering where agency and imposition intermingle to create performances of public personae that are unique and specific to a certain historical or cultural context. The theoretical underpinnings of this work—presentation of self, autobiography, and feminist perspectives—combine to illustrate how and when Kate Douglas Wiggin negotiated a multi-dimensional identity performance to her distinct advantage.

The study of autobiography is still a relatively young field within the study of literature; literary theorists such as Paul de Man and James Olney first began expanding the field of autobiographical studies in the 1970s beyond the traditional realm of memoirs written specifically for the purposes of publication. Olney identified the shift in the field when “‘agonizing questions of identity, self-definition, self-existence, or self-deception’ began to challenge any comfortable, unselfconscious investment in metaphysical selfhood.”<sup>23</sup> De Man built on this idea in his seminal essay, “Autobiography as Defacement,” stating:

Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject.<sup>24</sup>

De Man de-emphasizes the idea of genre, and instead places the emphasis on the interaction between the two subjects of the autobiography: the author and the implied reader.

These ideas of intentionality and agency are at the crux of current studies of autobiography and autobiographical theory. Like Butler, Martha Watson hearkens

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<sup>23</sup> Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Paul De Man, “Autobiography as Defacement,” *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 921.

back to Kenneth Burke's work exploring agency in language in order to examine the cohesion and motivations of actions. In *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists*, Watson provides a compelling model for exploring how women's autobiographies function rhetorically in the public sphere. In arguing that women activists such as Emma Goldman and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had to write their autobiographies in a manner that was imitable, because "followers and would-be adherents must see within the examples of the leaders models for their own actions," Watson also acknowledges that "a rhetorical persona can be a subtle creation. In writing, an author can create a nuanced portrait, one that complements and supplements an existing public image."<sup>25</sup> It is this nuanced portrait that aligns with Goffman's impression management in social situations; just as authors create a particular version of themselves in autobiographical writing, women like Kate Douglas Wiggin created versions of themselves to be *read* by the public. Ultimately, the blending of the theoretical concerns underpinning this broader definition of autobiography that informs the creation of public personae and acts of self-expression in the context of this work.

The continual expansion of autobiography beyond the page and into performance modalities is examined by contemporary theorists like Watson and Sidonie Smith. In *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*, Smith suggests that "Each autobiographical subject becomes what Lee Quinby labels 'multiply designated,' severally situated with diverse, sometimes congruous, often competing, even contradictory discursive

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<sup>25</sup> Martha Watson, *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 112, 114.

fields.”<sup>26</sup> As such, Smith identifies the possibility and the likelihood of the simultaneous construction of autobiographical subject and object, which aligns with Griswold’s understanding of cultural creator and cultural object. In *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, the Personal Narratives Group concurs with this construction, and sees personal narratives and autobiographical acts as allowing “us to see lives as simultaneously individual and social creations, and to see individuals as simultaneously the changers and the changed.”<sup>27</sup> This work will contend that Wiggins not only created her individual and social identities, but that she was conscious and aware of each one’s place.

As autobiographical studies enter the twenty-first century, theorists solidify their understanding of autobiography less as a genre than as a practice. In *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, editors Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield express this multi-faceted approach to autobiography:

In a further dimension of thinking about autobiography as practice, the “inner” part of the equation is being seen less as expression than as *performance*, which not only removes any notion of an essential self, but also implies an audience, and brings us back to another of the meanings of intersubjectivity. It draws attention to the processual, dynamic nature of subjectivity; there is an emphasis on verbs, not nouns—writing, not texts.<sup>28</sup>

Again, the audience is implicated in the practice and in the process by which the performance of self is renegotiated in response to both the audience and the social realities to which the individual is exposed.

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<sup>26</sup> Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, eds. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

Methodologically, I use multiple forms of evidence-gathering and analysis, from archival research to ethnography. I count myself fortunate to have been able to cull research from a variety of archives. The archives in Dartmouth College's Rauner Special Collections Library and those of the Association of Childhood Education International held in Special Collections at the University of Maryland Libraries proved particularly useful for documenting Wiggin's youth and early career as an advocate for early childhood education. The research library at the Maine Historical Society also provided excellent context for Wiggin's summers in Maine, including a number of newspaper notices of her philanthropic work in her later years. The Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England has an extensive archive of Wiggin materials that has continued to grow over the course of my time working with that collection. However, by far the most invaluable collection at my disposal was the private archive that has been virtually inaccessible to scholars for the last eighty-five years: an enormous amount of material that remained in Quillcote, Wiggin's summer house, after the property passed out of her family. In expanding Marcus's definition of the objects of autobiography, I add handwritten speeches, photographs, unfinished manuscripts, and other ephemera, primarily from the Quillcote Collection.

In the final chapter of "She Will Not Submit to Be Ignored," concepts of performing persona and acts of self-expression will be extended beyond Wiggin's own lifetime and into my own. This transition seeks to acknowledge both the archival material by and about Wiggin, and how this material continues to serve as a point of entry for the expressive performance of cultural memory. In *The Archive and the*

*Repertoire*, Diana Taylor argues persuasively for the inclusion of performance as “an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis.”<sup>29</sup> Taylor sees performance as both a discrete event and as “the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance,” one that can be employed to examine how “performance and aesthetics vary from community to community, reflecting cultural and historical specificity as much in the enactment as in the viewing/reception.”<sup>30</sup> In Taylor’s work, this bracketing (or the frame), allows the ethnographic scholar to acknowledge that “ethnography not only studies performance (the rituals and social dramas commentators habitually refer to); it is a kind of performance.”<sup>31</sup> When the ethnographer is admitted to be present in the performance, the social and cultural constructs of that performance become acknowledged as the frame for the ethnographer’s account.

While as early as the 1980s ethnographers like James Clifford had already begun to reconceptualize their work to include autoethnography as “the study, representation, or knowledge of a culture by one or more of its members” in order to critique essentialist assumptions of the authority of an ethnographer from outside the studied culture, significant strides in performance ethnography are tied to the work of Dwight Conquergood.<sup>32</sup> By employing what Conquergood termed “co-performer” or “co-performative witnessing,” I investigate how Wiggin’s acts of self-expression resonate into the twenty-first century. Furthermore, members of the community

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<sup>29</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), xvi.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>32</sup> James Buzard, “On Auto-Ethnographic Authority,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16, no. 1 (2003): 61.

invoke Wiggin's writing and nostalgically constructed identity performance to recreate a cohesive community identity in the small town in southern Maine where she drafted so many of her novels, plays, speeches, and letters. D. Soyini Madison, a colleague of Conquergood's at Northwestern University who has published on his work since his death in 2004, defines co-performative witnessing by characterizing it as "to live in and spend time in the borderlands of contested identities where you speak 'with' not 'to' others and where your (and their) ethnographic interlocutors are as co-temporal in the report and on stage as they were in the field."<sup>33</sup> It is "to be inside the breath and pulse of cultural performance as a feeling, sensing, being, and doing witness."<sup>34</sup> While I have not lived in southern Maine since my childhood, I still consider myself a member of the community and have spent significant time there working with the women of the Dorcas Society. Therefore, I have a unique insight into how the community continues to employ Wiggin's nuanced creation of her self and the history of the town in her writings in order to create a cohesive identity in the face of twenty-first century dissonance. In the final chapter of this study, another facet is added to this methodology as I examine Wiggin's performativity beyond her own life and into the twenty-first century. At this point, I introduce Dwight Conquergood's groundbreaking ethnographic approach as I employ co-performative witnessing to my interactive study of the Dorcas Society of Buxton and Hollis, Maine as a continued performance locus of Wiggin and her work.

The ephemera from the Quillcote collection, along with Goffman's theories of the performance of self, form the foundation of my investigation of Kate Douglas

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<sup>33</sup> D. Soyini Madison, "Co-Performative Witnessing," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 6 (2007): 828.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 829.

Wiggin's acts of self-expression. All of these evidentiary pieces come together to shed light on those moments of slippage to which Goffman refers, allowing me to create an expanded theory of the performance of self that has a different understanding of intentionality than Goffman's impression management. In my theory, intentionality is not solely focused outward, on the acceptance or dissonance created by the performance of self in a specific social context; rather, the person also attempts to create cohesion of him/herself, for him/herself. This notion of the simultaneous inward and outward focus of performing identity and impression management builds throughout the course of this work, culminating in the exploration of Wiggin's continuing role in shaping rural community identity in Southern Maine. For the purposes of this study, I will alternately use the terms "performing persona," "performance of self," or "acts of self-expression" as a means to define *all of the acts involved in the creation of a complete and coherent expression of self*, including those moments that have been previously understood under Goffman's rubric for performance of self, and those moments that have been delineated according to autobiography and identity theorists such as Watson, Olney, and Butler.

The theoretical and methodological concerns outlined above are best understood through the analogy of the stereopticon. A stereopticon or stereoscope is double magic lantern arranged to combine two images of the same object or scene upon a screen, so as to produce the appearance of solidity as in a stereoscope; it is also used to cause the image of one object or scene to pass gradually into that of another with dissolving effect. The invention of the stereoscope was pioneered by Sir Charles Wheatstone and Sir David Brewster, but first patented by French optician and



entrepreneur Jules Duboscq in 1852. However, it was not until Oliver Wendell Holmes developed a handheld stereoscope that made mass production for middle class consumers possible in 1859 that the public had easy access to this novelty.<sup>35</sup> In America, stereoscopes of one form or another were found in most family parlors from the Civil War to World War II, the same period during which Wiggin lived, and “symbolized conspicuous consumption, both in their possession...and in the claim to ‘refinement’ and ‘culture’ that their use implied.”<sup>36</sup> In each chapter of this study, I will be employing simultaneously the multiple methodologies referenced in the same manner as a stereoscope, in order to provide a more dimensional and fully developed picture of Wiggin and her own claims to cultural refinement and appropriate construction of the autobiographical self.

By extending the examination of Wiggin’s acts of self-expression beyond the confines of her life, I am immediately afforded the opportunity to practically *apply* my theoretical construct. This theory presents possibilities for further work modeled after both Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* and Conquergood’s co-performative witnessing, in order to add analytical depth to studies of collective memory, nostalgia, and hegemonic social structures, and the simultaneous performances of personae.

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<sup>35</sup> See Paul Wing, *Stereoscopes: The First One Hundred Years* (Nashua, NH: Transition Publishing, 1996); 249; and William C. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg, PA: W. C. Darrah, Publisher, 1977), 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 197. See, also, Del Phillips, “A Brief Stereoscopic History,” *A Visual History of the Stereoscope*. Available from <http://home.centurytel.net/s3dcor/history.htm>. Internet; accessed 2 April 2008.

## Chapter Structure

Chapter One, ““Contented Child of Long Ago”<sup>37</sup>: Impression Management and Persona Performance of and through Wiggin’s Childhood,” focuses on the early performative and theatrical events and associations that shaped Wiggin’s youth prior to her involvement with the Free Kindergarten Movement. Much of the evidence of her early childhood memories of play and performance is garnered from Wiggin’s autobiography, *My Garden of Memory*, and Smith’s biography, *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her*. While both of these texts are chronologically far removed from Wiggin’s youth, the vivid descriptions of elements of Wiggin’s childhood offer insight into how performance constantly intermingled with both her leisure and her work habits. In addition, by focusing on events from her early years that are structured within the storytelling frame of these two sources, I make assertions about both the content and the frame, the story of Wiggin’s upbringing and the autobiographical act of writing about it, in order to lay the foundation for Wiggin’s work towards a cohesive performance of self.

Chapter Two, ““It is His Impulse to Create that Should Gladden Thee”<sup>38</sup>: Creativity, Play, and Wiggin’s Role in the Free Kindergarten Movement,” again employs a stereoptic focus. This chapter explores the performative aspects of Friedrich Froebel’s kindergarten philosophy, which has at its center a belief that play and the act of artifice is fundamental to shaping both knowledge and behavioral

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<sup>37</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “When I Was A Little Girl,” *Ladies Home Journal* (April 1915), 74.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *The Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Froebel’s Mother Play*, trans. Henrietta Robins Mack Eliot and Susan Elizabeth Blow (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 273.

patterns. Married to this analysis is a scrutiny of Wiggin's creation of a persona of the naïve and wide-eyed disciple of Froebelian concepts of play who helped to establish free kindergartens in the United States. Here, I argue that the naiveté she exhibited was in part a constructed performance in order to build on the rhetoric already established for the Kindergarten Movement in America by notable educational reformers such as Emma Marwedel, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, and Caroline Severance. This ingenuous performance is countered by evidence of other rhetorical strategies Wiggin employed to secure the success of the Silver Street Kindergarten in the impoverished San Francisco neighborhood known as Tar Flats.

Chapter Three, ““Overwhelmed with Embarrassment and Responsibility”<sup>39</sup>: Wiggin's ‘Private’ Public Speaking,” focuses on the simultaneous performances of educator, orator, and fledgling author that Wiggin enacted from her establishment of the Silver Street Kindergarten in 1878 through her years of “semi-professional” public speaking to her disingenuous retirement from the platform at the time of her marriage to her second husband, George C. Riggs. By pairing texts of speeches delivered in a variety of venues with both private and professional correspondence regarding her public speaking engagements, I analyze the rhetorical strategies Wiggin employed in order to manage the public's impression of her within a social framework that was still to some degree a contested one for women.

Chapter Four, ““Adventures in Playmaking”<sup>40</sup>: Wiggin's Dramatic Collaborations and Adaptations,” is bound to more traditional concepts of dramaturgy and theatre. “Adventures in Playmaking” creates a throughline that connects

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<sup>39</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 218.

<sup>40</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “Reminiscences of a Late Playwright,” *Good Housekeeping* (July, 1919), 151.

Wiggin's early interest and amateur experiences with the theatre as discussed in Chapter One to the stage adaptations of her literary work. Wiggin added the roles of playwright and collaborator to her performances of personae, not only building on her experience in amateur theatricals, but also positioning her elocutionary work as a creative incubator for the dramatization of her characters. Despite having adapted only four of her novels to the stage, and having garnered financial success solely with *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, Wiggin devotes two chapters of her autobiography to her playwriting endeavors. The relatively small impact playwriting seemed to have on the entirety of her career is belied by the wealth of rhetorical roles she adopted to justify her entrance into the dramatic genre. In this chapter, I argue that, by positioning herself both as the maternal protector of her innocent creations and as the beleaguered author bowing to the wisdom and demands of her audience, Wiggin justified her continued professional presence based on numerous icons of traditional femininity that began to be displaced by the early decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter Five, ““We Women Cannot be Content to be Mere Spectators”<sup>41</sup>: Performing Philanthropy and the Continued Legacy of Wiggin's Autobiographical Acts,” focuses on the philanthropic work of the Dorcas Society of Buxton and Hollis, Maine. Founded in 1897 by Wiggin, her sister, and a group of women from the communities that share the Saco River as their adjacent border, the Dorcas Society's mission, to carry on good works in the communities, reflected the women's shared identity as municipal housekeepers. The Municipal Housekeeping Movement was built on the premise that, if housekeeping was “the art making the home clean,

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<sup>41</sup> Speech labeled “Philanthropy” by Kate Douglas Wiggin, date unknown, Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

healthy, comfortable and attractive,” then *municipal housekeeping* was “the science of making the city clean, healthy, comfortable and attractive.”<sup>42</sup> While many of the social reform groups espousing these principles disbanded once social reform became more fully integrated into government (especially following the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment), the Dorcas Society of Buxton and Hollis, Maine has continued Wiggin’s community-based work for over a century of sustained philanthropic endeavors. The argument in this chapter is two-pronged: first, I position Wiggin’s philanthropic work as her culminating act of self-expression that attempted to construct a coherent and integrated persona to leave as a legacy. In addition, I argue that the Dorcas Society has survived in part due to its ability to define its cultural history and collective self via iterative performances of a fictive past formulated in large part through Wiggin’s life and works.

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<sup>42</sup> Mildred Chadsey, “Municipal Housekeeping,” *The Journal of Home Economics* 7, no. 2 (February, 1915): 53.

## Chapter 1: “Contented Child of Long Ago”<sup>43</sup>: Impression Management and Persona Performance of and Through Wiggin’s Childhood

In “When I Was a Little Girl,” Kate Douglas Wiggin’s 1915 article-length memoir for the *Ladies Home Journal*, she positions herself in her past and her present simultaneously, as she examines the “simple, busy, contented child of long ago, peering out at [her] from the haze of the past.”<sup>44</sup> Immediately, Wiggin’s work exemplifies what Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn point to as the complexities of memory, and, by extension, autobiographical accounts of memory: that “one’s memory of any given situation is multiform and that its many forms are situated in place and time from the perspective of the present. To put this another way, memory has a history, or more precisely, histories.”<sup>45</sup> Memory’s histories call forth the simultaneity of Wiggin’s acts of self-expression as she memorializes specific aspects of her youth in shorter autobiographical writing, such as “When I Was a Little Girl,” as well as in her book-length autobiography, *My Garden of Memory*, in which her adult self ponders how much of the spirited child she had been continued to exist in the woman she was at the moment of engaging in the act of autobiography.

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<sup>43</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “When I Was A Little Girl,” (*Ladies Home Journal*, April 1915), 74.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, “Introduction,” *Representations: Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory* 26 (Spring, 1989), 2.

The simple girl Wiggin sees, whose “girlhood gayeties” and “childhood plays and pleasures” are the subjects and titles of the early chapters of *My Garden of Memory*, is in fact the only rendering of her childhood that subsequent readers and scholars have, because the published biographical works on Wiggin rely almost exclusively on Wiggin and her autobiographical writing as source material. Even the most inclusive biography undertaken after her death, written by her sister, Nora Archibald Smith, and titled, *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her*, acknowledged that even when not citing *My Garden of Memory* directly, Smith was using the same source material that she had collected when helping Wiggin edit her autobiography. Smith closed her biography by reminiscing about that process: “So I found when the heart-searching task of going through my sister’s papers devolved upon me, many packages marked, ‘Posthumous,’ ‘For Biography, if Nora survives me,’ ‘What I cannot say myself,’ etc., and thus I feel as if the writing of this book were a sacred duty as well as a dear privilege.”<sup>46</sup> Given Smith’s acknowledgement of Wiggin’s selective process of documenting her persona, I contend that Wiggin constructs a cohesive performance of self that substantiates her adult identity as a writer, an educator, a performer, and a philanthropist based on the version of her childhood that she privileges. In addition, by employing Goffman’s frame analysis, I argue that the manner in which Wiggin frames the events of her childhood participates in widely accepted tropes of autobiographical writing utilized in order to justify and validate her work—and her life. Zemon Davis’s and Starn’s argument that the memory’s perspective is shaped by the moment of remembering reinforces my

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<sup>46</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, *Kate Douglas Wiggin, As her Sister Knew Her* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 376-377.

assertion that Wiggin's choice to highlight certain moments of her girlhood attempts a form of impression management, a fashioning of a frame through which her audience views the entirety of her life, to ensure that her autobiographical legacy includes that complete and coherent expression of self that shapes her public personae.<sup>47</sup> Wiggin selects key moments from her past to reinforce acts of self-expression that integrate the multiple public personae she embraced in her life and presents them as naturally developing. In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of biographical and autobiographical source material, acknowledging how her selection of events for inclusion, "shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness," work in the act of self-representation.<sup>48</sup> Then I will focus on key memories Wiggin selects from her youth that aid in her attempts to create the coherent expression of self. These memories include her meeting with Dickens, which served as a wellspring of her literary career; recollections of her early education, which downplay her role as student and highlight her early inclination toward teaching, and her creative affinities with both the musical and the theatrical, which served to justify the multiple modes of performance in which she participated as an adult.

### **Framing Pictures of her Past, Making Memories in her Present**

While short biographical sketches about Wiggin did appear in print during her lifetime, few touch on her formative years, or do so only to pass on the bare facts of

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<sup>47</sup> Zemon Davis and Starn, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 5.



her birth in Philadelphia, her rearing in rural New England, and her family's subsequent move to Northern California.<sup>49</sup> These sources all romanticize Wiggin's upbringing and reiterate or reinforce her own construction of her youth, painting it primarily as a rural idyll. Many of these biographers align their characterization of Wiggin's youth to her own representation of it, while several differ on a single key point: when this childhood in fact began. Those written during her lifetime variously list her date of birth as 1857, 1858, and 1859, while all records published after her death, beginning with the biography written by her sister, Nora Archibald Smith, give Wiggin's date of birth as September 28, 1856.<sup>50</sup> Whether the variance in birth date was her own conceit or an error committed by her contemporary biographers is a mystery; no mention in any of these sources exists as to whether she supplied that biographical data directly to them, or if they built upon her short autobiographical works—such as “When I was a Little Girl,” “Adventures of a Late Playwright,” and “A Child's Journey with Dickens”—works that Wiggin had already given to the public. Furthermore, *My Garden of Memory* is unabashedly vague chronologically. In this work, Wiggin avers that her “memory is a capricious and treacherous one” and that she “never paid any attention to dates,” often “forgetting the exact year in which occurred serious family events such as births, marriages, deaths and the removals to

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<sup>49</sup> See Arthur B. Maurice's “Makers of Modern American Fiction (Women),” *The Mentor* 7, no. 13 (August, 1919), 1-24; and Grant Overton's *The Women Who Make Our Novels* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919): 121-31. Note that, by the 1929 edition of Overton's text, Wiggin's biography is condensed and omits any mention of her childhood. See also Hamilton Wright Mabie's “Kate Douglas Wiggin: Her Place Among Contemporary American Writers,” and by Norma Bright Carson's “Kate Douglas Wiggin Riggs: Some Facts from her Biography,” both in *The Book News Monthly* 25, no. 10 (June, 1907): 650-54.

<sup>50</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, *Kate Douglas Wiggin, As Her Sister Knew Her* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), frontispiece.

new homes in far-away places.”<sup>51</sup> Wiggin uses this “entire absence of chronological faculty” as a device to self-select her past, enabling her to create the coherent impression of her identity which is carried forward by her biographers.<sup>52</sup> I argue that this rhetorical conceit is one way in which Wiggin performs her childhood persona, carefully selecting those events and their time settings which will most clearly contribute to the portrayal she has chosen for herself.

Before exploring further the complexities of Wiggin’s performance of her youthful self, a specific construct of her past needs attention. In the foreword to *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin makes genealogically-based assertions concerning the formation of her own character. Her rhetorical strategy involves pondering what “many score of ordinary, commonplace progenitors bequeath to their great-grandchildren” while simultaneously highlighting accomplishments of her ancestors.<sup>53</sup> She invokes the accomplishments of her paternal grandfather, Noah Smith, Jr., who was Secretary of the United States Senate during the Civil War, and by doing so, she participates in the traditional autobiographical strategy of the “Great Man” narrative. Prior to the expansion of the genre to include life-writing and diaries, autobiography was seen as “devoted exclusively to the defence [sic] and glorification of a man, a career, a political cause” that is “limited almost entirely to the public sector of existence.”<sup>54</sup> Adding to Gusdorf’s argument, autobiographical theorist Sidonie Smith points out that autobiography as a genre leading up to Wiggin’s era

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<sup>51</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 16-17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. While this statement could be purely a rhetorical strategy on her part, much of the materials in the archives I have studied, include the privately held Quillcote Collection, contain little to no chronological information.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

<sup>54</sup> Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” in James Olney’s *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 36.

was largely defined as a master narrative that focused on the “architecture of the universal subject” and that subject sprang from the “normative (masculine) individuality.”<sup>55</sup> While women were writing autobiographically prior to Wiggin’s time, they often found it necessary to develop and incorporate rhetorical strategies to justify their autobiographical act. By beginning *My Garden of Memory* with the public deeds of her forefathers, Wiggin rhetorically aligns herself with this canon of “normative identity.”<sup>56</sup> However by calling forth the “ordinary, commonplace progenitors” at the same time, she destabilizes the “glorification” that is at the center of the “Great Man” narrative and creates an opportunity to mesh this universal subjectivity with a rhetorical femininity that characterizes a large segment of women’s writing coming out of the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup>

Wiggin complicates her genealogical assertions with scant mention of her father who would ostensibly be the “Great Man” who would provide the most direct link in such a genealogical construction of identity. Other than noting that he was “a young lawyer, who went on a business journey to a Western State and died there shortly after,” and that one of her only memories of him was of the tears he shed when they parted, Wiggin does not dwell on her father—or his absence.<sup>58</sup> There are numerous possibilities for this slight. While Robert Noah Smith died in Springfield, Illinois when Wiggin was four years old, recently uncovered facts of Smith’s relationship with his family point to slippages in Wiggin’s ability to manage her

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<sup>55</sup> Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, xxiii. In addition, in *Appropriat[ing] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth Century America*, Carol Mattingly explores gendered public performance through attire, and how the WCTU adopted a style of dress “as the signifier of the ‘womanly’ rhetor” (112) in opposition to the Bloomer.

<sup>58</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 3.

public persona through the inclusion of her genealogy. While working on *Calais, Maine Families: They Came and They Went*, a history of the town's founding families, Thelma Eye Brooks discovered court documents from 1858 granting Wiggin's mother, Helen Dyer Smith, a divorce on the grounds that Wiggin's father was adulterous. According to the divorce decree, Robert Smith was "drunken in his habits, and at times abusive, and quarrelsome."<sup>59</sup> Brooks speculated that Wiggin and her sister may not have been aware of their parents' divorce, and that their mother chose to tell them only that he died out of state after a brief illness, when in fact his obituary in his hometown newspaper listed that he was killed in a railroad accident in 1860.<sup>60</sup> Whether Wiggin knowingly hid the facts of her parents' relationship or not is irrelevant, save for acknowledging that Wiggin was not simply one of the "passive reflectors of [cultural] vocabularies," but like all autobiographers who "engage in artful self-presentation" she focuses on those aspects of her parentage that reinforce the representation of herself which she holds significant.<sup>61</sup> Her focus is on reading and writing, education, and her creative efforts in music and theatre. In looking back and recreating her past in her autobiography, Wiggin selects those memories and moments from her childhood that serve to reinforce her preferred self-expression of her adulthood.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in "Hidden Thorns: Local Genealogist Sheds New Light on Childhood of Kate Douglas Wiggin" *Kennebec Journal Morning Sentinel*, 24 November 2002. Available online at [http://www.centralmaine.com/news/stories/021124wiggin\\_r.shtml](http://www.centralmaine.com/news/stories/021124wiggin_r.shtml). Accessed 27 July 2004. See also Thelma Eye Brook's *Calais, Maine Families: They Came and They Went* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2002).

<sup>60</sup> "Hidden Thorns".

<sup>61</sup> Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 165.

## **An autobiographical pact with “The Adored One”: Creating a Literary Genealogy to include Charles Dickens**

In *Composing a Life*, Mary Catherine Bateson asserts that, “because we are engaged in a day-by-day process of self-invention...both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual.”<sup>62</sup> Wiggin shapes and reshapes her past in order to manage her own self-invention. As early as 1912, Wiggin began to shape text-based performances of her childhood. While her lengthy autobiography is the end product of all of these writing endeavors, the earlier published pieces inform that work. The previously mentioned “When I Was a Little Girl” is certainly one instance of Wiggin’s more succinct autobiographical writing, but perhaps the most celebrated memory of her childhood was one that she chronicled in “A Child’s Journey with Dickens.”<sup>63</sup>

First written as a banquet speech celebrating Charles Dickens’ centenary, “A Child’s Journey with Dickens” recounts the tale of how, as a young girl of about ten, Wiggin shared a train ride with Dickens from Portland, Maine to Boston on his 1868 tour of America. The speech was subsequently published as a small book under Houghton Mifflin, Wiggin’s publisher, and portions were reprinted in literary magazines.<sup>64</sup> Wiggin’s slim volume tells the story of a precocious child with an ardent admiration for the work of the world-renowned literary gentleman whose novels—“more eagerly devoured than all the rest”—lined the two lowest shelves in

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<sup>62</sup> Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989), 28.

<sup>63</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *A Child’s Journey with Dickens* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.; reprinted material appears in *The Literary Digest* 6 April 1912, under the same title.

the family's library.<sup>65</sup> The young Wiggin, upon realizing the great Dickens was traveling in the very next train car, took it upon herself not only to go speak with the novelist, but to engage in a lengthy critique of his works.

Having survived one of the worst train wrecks in British history, Dickens was an uneasy railway passenger; in her text, Wiggin intimates that it was only her sparkling conversation and witty critique of his work that put him at ease for this particular trip.<sup>66</sup> While her mother was distracted, Wiggin "planted [her]self breathlessly and timorously down, an unbidden guest, in the seat of honor" beside Dickens that had just been vacated by his traveling companion.<sup>67</sup> Wiggin then described both how her younger self unequivocally admitted to the man that she had read all of his books except the two the family planned to purchase while in Boston, and that she was known to "skip some of the very dull parts once in a while; not the short dull parts, but the long ones."<sup>68</sup> At this, Wiggin recounted that, "whether to amuse himself, or to amuse me...he took out a notebook and pencil from his pocket and proceeded to give me an exhausting and exhaustive examination on this subject" jotting notes as to where in his stories she felt "the dull parts predominated."<sup>69</sup> While Wiggin admitted that some of her recollection of the event was eclipsed both by her childish excitement and the subsequent lapse of time, she notes that some of the conversation between her and the famous author was printed the following day in the

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<sup>65</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, Maine), 25 November 2002. Gerald Dickens, a descendent of the author who has created a solo performance piece built upon Wiggin's *A Child's Journey with Dickens*, describes in detail Dickens' experience in the 1865 Staplehurst train crash that resulted in ten deaths and almost 50 injuries after railway workers misread the timetable and removed a portion of track, causing the train to plunge off a precipice.

<sup>67</sup> Wiggin, *A Child's Journey with Dickens*, 18; *My Garden of Memory*, 37. As different versions of this story have been published, I cite both here for easier reference.

<sup>68</sup> Wiggin, *A Child's Journey with Dickens*, 20; *My Garden of Memory*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 38.

Boston newspaper.<sup>70</sup> While this ostensibly leaves the reader the opportunity to decide whether or not it was Dickens himself who chose to publicly acknowledge the literary inquisitiveness of the future authoress, in actuality Wiggin used the reference to the third-party report of the incident to reinforced her underlying assertion that her performative identity as author was rooted in her youth.

What makes this characterization of Wiggin's childhood important to the construction and performance of her public persona is the means by which she positions the story to rhetorically solidify an alliance between her literary accomplishments and those of Dickens. While Wiggin makes sure to characterize her younger self as a naïve chatterbox who ingenuously enters into a weighty literary discussion with Dickens, having "followed the dictates of [her] countrified little heart, and scraped acquaintance confidently with the magician who had glorified [her] childhood by his art," the story is framed by the affinity of authorship.<sup>71</sup> Wiggin has given her younger self the literary authority she had as a successful writer in her adulthood by including her literary discussion with Dickens and her knowledgeable critique of his works. Wiggin creates a rhetorical structure for her memory, which matches Goffman's definition of a social framework, providing "the background understanding of events" which leads to a coherent representation of Wiggin's agency.<sup>72</sup> However, the performed persona that is the primary focus of this framework is not only that of Wiggin as a child engaging with her literary hero, but also the adult Wiggin, herself an important literary figure, looking back at her past. This shift in vantage point aligns with the assertion of autobiography scholar Paul

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<sup>70</sup> Wiggin, *A Child's Journey with Dickens*, 23-24; *My Garden of Memory*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 32; 43.

<sup>72</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 22.

John Eakin that “the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of the present consciousness”, who further acknowledges an interdependence among memory, history, and identity performance.<sup>73</sup> Wiggin employs this commingling of memory, history, and the autobiographical rhetoric inherent in identity performance to ally her adult self with Dickens, pointing her readership toward a specific characterization that provides cohesion between her Wiggin’s youth and adulthood.

The act that solidifies the parallels between herself and Dickens is a portion of text that does not appear in the original speech honoring Dickens. However, this section is included in her autobiography. In the latter, Wiggin created an additional social framework that contains comparative possibilities between her adult self and Dickens by inserting a parallel chance encounter. The parallel rhetoric is fluidly integrated into the story of her own meeting with Dickens; at the close of her tale, Wiggin admits that some of the dialogue she related was not lifted from her own memory, but relayed “years afterward by the old lady sitting in the next seat, and who overheard as much of the conversation as she possibly could.... Her penciled notes, read to me when we met by chance...have helped me greatly in the minor details of the interview and my own phraseology, which amused her because of its chatterbox fluency and the amazing response it elicited from so great a man.”<sup>74</sup> The implication Wiggin creates here is that even as a child, her choice of words was still worthy of note by both the average person and the literary great, foreshadowing the role she would assume as an adult.

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<sup>73</sup> Eakin, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 42.



By recounting the stories of her meeting with Dickens and her subsequent meeting with the unnamed admirer, Wiggin creates a literary genealogy that again pays homage to the autobiographical rhetoric of the “Great Man,” and irrevocably connects her renown to Dickens. The genealogy is extended beyond Wiggin by another author’s repetition of the trope. In an interesting postscript to Wiggin’s representation of her youthful literary inclinations, Wiggin’s rhetorical strategy of creating kinship with a famous author to justify her own literary position is deployed upon her by another writer. Rachel Field, a dramatist and children’s author following in Wiggin’s wake, won the 1930 Newberry Medal for her children’s story, *Hitty: Her First Hundred Years*. Hitty is a wooden doll whose many adventures through the years include meeting Charles Dickens on one of his American tours. However, while Field was able to extend Wiggin’s experience as source material for her own work, she also created another generation of autobiographical and literary kinship. Wiggin’s adventure meeting Dickens elicited a similar treatise from Field in a 1934 issue of *The American Girl*, in which Field recalls meeting Wiggin.<sup>75</sup> After the Girl Scouts reprinted the story of Wiggin meeting Dickens in their monthly publication for girls, they published Field’s “History Repeats Itself” as its sequel. In it, Field anointed Wiggin with the role of the literary luminary and took the part of the precocious young fan for herself, commenting, “I like to think she remembered that ride of hers with Dickens, and that she knew the tradition was going on, only with her own role reversed.”<sup>76</sup> Wiggin’s “role” as author not only provides a frame for her own

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<sup>75</sup> Rachel Field, “History Repeats Itself,” *The American Girl* (November, 1934), 10; 42. Found in the Maine Women Writers Collection, Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

autobiographical context, but also supplied a context for another author to claim association to the literary heritage Wiggin evoked.

### **“A Dawning Pedagogic Instinct:”<sup>77</sup> The Role of Education in Wiggin’s Early Years**

Early in her life, Wiggin developed an aptitude for combining literary work with pedagogy. While some of her first professional writing was undertaken to raise funds for the Silver Street Kindergarten, Wiggin reaches back to her recollection of her youth to present her audience evidence of her first pedagogical “texts.”<sup>78</sup> Wiggin reminisces about having “created orphan asylums of dolls” in which “the pasteboard mother or matron” gave “daily instruction in the three R’s.”<sup>79</sup> For her paper doll school, Wiggin created a “Doll’s Spelling Book” that contained precisely written words and definitions for her dolls to memorize. What makes this piece of childhood ephemera so interesting to this study is that, as a child, Wiggin took the time to model her little “inch and a half square” dictionary on published texts from her own shelves. The title page for the tiny book contained not only the name of her small tome, but also the notation “Hollis. Entered according to Act of Congress 1866.”<sup>80</sup> While this seems an insignificant memory that could easily be cast aside, Wiggin used this recollection to simultaneously situate her past within literary and pedagogical

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<sup>77</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 11.

<sup>78</sup> While “Half a Dozen Housekeepers” was Wiggin’s first published story, the story was submitted prior to her transition into the field of education. *The Story of Patsy* and *The Birds’ Christmas Carol* were both written to raise funds for the Free Kindergarten Association and the Silver Street Kindergarten in San Francisco.

<sup>79</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, *Kate Douglas Wiggin, As Her Sister Knew Her*, 21. N.B.: The version of the story that appears in *My Garden of Memory* dates the *Doll’s Spelling Book* at 1864.

frameworks. By characterizing this small text as a literary endeavor, she forged links between her performance of her author persona and that as educator.

Wiggin positioned this memory both as “the only evidence extant of any intuition on my part regarding the author’s craft” and as an act that foreshadows her “future absorbing interest in education.”<sup>81</sup> Here, Wiggin acknowledged overlaps between writing and teaching in her youth that allowed her to intermingle those same roles in her adult persona. The inclusion of what is arguably a minor memento of her childhood enabled Wiggin to unite her persona as author and her persona as educator by framing one act of remembrance in two ways. By remembering a moment in her youth that ties together two aspects of her performance of self as an adult, Wiggin avoids those moments Goffman points to wherein the “whole machinery of self-production is cumbersome” and threatens to expose the disparate parts or roles being played.<sup>82</sup> Instead, she inscribes the memory with aspects of who she was at the moment of remembering, working toward the complete and coherent expression of self that is the aim.

The paper doll asylum was certainly not the only example of Wiggin’s pedagogical calling at an early age. One recollection she presents to help manage her self-representation in *My Garden of Memory* focuses on the frog pond adjacent to her childhood home. At one end of the frog pond she and her sister set up a “hospital” to nurse wounded bullfrogs who had been “stoned by cruel small boys,” the other end was devoted to a frog “nursery.”<sup>83</sup> Wiggin framed this incident within the context of the “dawning pedagogical instinct” that led the sisters to administer to these

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<sup>81</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 12, 13.

<sup>82</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 253.

<sup>83</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 11.

pollywogs. Their instructional methodology included allowing the young frogs to mingle with the adult frogs once a day “so that they might not be cut off from the advantages of adult society,” as well as occasionally introducing their frog pupils to the “little silver shiners and tiny minnows” they put into the pool.<sup>84</sup> In her autobiography, Wiggin maintained an image of herself having a pedagogical instinct that this intermingling with other forms of life was important to the development of their students so that “they will know now, you see, that there are other things in the world except frogs.”<sup>85</sup> However, this is arguably a moment more constructed than remembered: the impetus behind this act is strikingly similar to one of the key concepts underpinning the pedagogical philosophies upon which Wiggin’s educational methodology are structured.

Wiggin’s work as an educator was based upon the theories of Friedrich Froebel, the German educational reformer whose studies of children’s learning capacities led to the development of kindergartens first in his native country and eventually world-wide. According to Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, one of Wiggin’s mentors in the Free Kindergarten Movement in America, Froebel theorized that children required “a larger social sphere than the nursery” to aid in the transition from home to school.<sup>86</sup> In selecting this recollection of the frog nursery for inclusion in *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin reaffirmed her commitment not just to education, but more importantly, she loosely re-envisioned her educational past through the tenets of Froebel’s philosophies relating to early childhood education. While Wiggin’s

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Lectures in the Training School for Kindergartners* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1897), 75. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

involvement with Froebel's teachings and her advocacy of the Free Kindergarten Movement in America are the subject of the next chapter, the consolidation of the acts of self-expression of her childhood parallels Froebel's kindergarten philosophies.

Froebel's observations of young children led him to design a pedagogical model that aimed "to strengthen and develop productive activity" in a social context that aided children's transition from nursery to school.<sup>87</sup> The underlying premise of Froebel's educational model was that the child's "mind grows through self-revelation" and that there was a direct relationship between the child's activities while at play and the development of the mind.<sup>88</sup> Complementing this premise in Froebel's pedagogy is the concept that everything and every action had a purpose, but "not as necessarily resulting in a predetermined style or pattern of growth."<sup>89</sup> Froebel's methodology involved using children's natural modes of play as a form of instruction, including performative aspects of play such as pantomime, charades, singing, and dancing. While this kind of performative playmaking is certainly evident throughout her childhood, Wiggin works within the frame of the story of the frog nursery to recall specific moments of her childhood in which her own creative play placed her in the role of educator, using Froebel's tenets as a way to justify the development of her performance of self in this role.

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<sup>87</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Archibald Smith, *Froebel's Occupations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1896), 8.

<sup>88</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man* trans. William Nicholas Hailmann (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), vi.

<sup>89</sup> Irene M. Lilly, Introduction to *Friedrich Froebel: A Selection from his Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 10.

The most definitive of these moments when her recollection of her childhood and her adult role as kindergartner intertwine is the account of the two young sisters as the schoolmistresses at their frog nursery. Wiggin wrote:

We held a frog singing-school once a week. It was very troublesome, but exciting. We used to put a nice little board across the pool and then catch the frogs and try to keep them in line with their heads all facing the same way during the brief lesson. They never really caught the idea, and were never in a singing mood until just before our own early Bedtime, when the baby frogs were so sleepy that they kept falling from the board into the pool. They could never quite apprehend the difference between school and pool; but at the end of the summer's training we twice succeeded in getting them into line, quiet, docile, motionless, without a hint of the application of force; tact, moral suasion, and superhuman patience being the only means employed.<sup>90</sup>

Wiggin and her sister clearly illustrate here Froebel's focus on play as a form of instruction, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Though seemingly trivial, these incidents are in fact highly suggestive. Wiggin chose a minor event from her childhood, one that naturally falls in line with the "creative activity...reached by the exercise of fancy and imagination" that proponents of Froebel's pedagogy espoused, to characterize herself as a young girl.<sup>91</sup> In doing so, she "framed" her young self in the role of the educator she eventually became.

Wiggin crafted a performance of self that married the narrative of her past to her public persona at the moment of assembling her autobiography. Directly following her recollection of the frog singing-school, Wiggin stated that "it does not need the prophetic gift of an Amos or an Ezekiel to see in this sort of play a foreshadowing of my future absorbing interest in education," forging the frame for

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<sup>90</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 11-12.

<sup>91</sup> W. T. Harris, preface to *Friedrich Froebel's Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (London: Edward Arnold, 1897), vii.

her reading audience through which they could view the educator *in* the child.<sup>92</sup> Yet while Wiggin goes into great detail concerning her school for frogs, she spends relatively few words on herself as a student. She does devote a short chapter of *My Garden of Memory* to “School Days and Home Teaching”; however, most of the focus of these pages is given to the Gorham Female Seminary, which she only attended from the ages of about thirteen to fifteen.<sup>93</sup> She writes that she “learned little or nothing” but managed to “grow in vision, instinct, and wisdom” while boarding there.<sup>94</sup> Wiggin de-emphasized her formal education in her autobiography, and while the lack of evidence certainly does not suggest a lack of education, it can be construed as evidence of its lack of importance in her self-representation at the end of her life. Her autobiography and the identity performance in it are created from the pieces of her past that she chose to include and relate.

So while there is no cause to question whether or not Wiggin may have indeed conducted a singing school for frogs as a child, and that she certainly received a broad and varied education of her own, she *chose* to recall and utilize material from her childhood that forged the link between that education in her youth and her position of prominence within the field of early childhood education in America at the end of the nineteenth century. This correlation aided Wiggin in the formation of a performance of self that created the complete and coherent identity she chose as her legacy, unifying her memories of herself as a child with those of her early involvement in the Free Kindergarten Movement, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

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<sup>92</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

### **“A Door into Fairyland”:<sup>95</sup> On the Threshold of Life as a Performer**

There are just three short chapters in *My Garden of Memory* that mark Wiggin’s transition from childhood to young adult and her family’s westward migration during those years. These chapters—“Stepping Westward,” “Girlhood Gayeties,” and “An Operatic Friendship”—represent Wiggin’s recollection of the few brief years her family spent in Santa Barbara, California, before her stepfather’s sudden death thrust Wiggin into the role of family provider, and led to her lifelong association with early childhood education and the Free Kindergarten Movement in America. Although brief, these chapters bring into focus the transitional period from childhood to adulthood, a time which Wiggin felt “proved to be the most irresponsible, delightful, entirely healthful and enchanting year or two” of her life.<sup>96</sup> While these chapters move Wiggin outside the autobiographical construct of the “Great Man” narrative arc by focusing on seemingly minor incidents of recreation and pleasure, they still work to solidify the complete and coherent representation of self that she attempts, and are foundational in the creation of personae that seek to negotiate changes in the middle-class understanding of public and private propriety moving from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

In these transitional chapters, Wiggin chooses a specific association from her teenage years to link various aspects of the theatrical and the performative which she would incorporate in her adult performance of self. While simply a lengthy vignette about an early brush with fame on the surface, the theatrical connections within this particular recollection exemplify Wiggin’s attempted impression management across

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<sup>95</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 70.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.



her lifetime. Wiggin neatly accomplished the elision of time within the construct of her theatrically-associated identity by focusing on her youthful friendship with Annie Louise Cary while simultaneously acknowledging that her recollection occurred “through the mists of bygone years” and was therefore shaped by the act of remembering as posited by Zemon Davis and Starn.<sup>97</sup> Wiggin forged links between her early associations with famous performers and her ventures on the public speaking platform, the shift in her writing when she started adapting her work to the stage, and, to a certain extent, her later philanthropic work.

As a teen, after her family had moved to California for her stepfather’s health and to try their fortunes in the land boom there, Wiggin’s brushes with fame turned from the literary to the theatrical. During the two theatrical seasons between 1877 and 1879, Max Strakosch, a concert and opera impresario, toured his company through San Francisco. While the soprano Clara Louise Kellogg ostensibly had top billing, one of the best known American contraltos of the era, Annie Louise Cary, was equally well known and at the height of her career. George C. D. Odell referred to Cary’s portrayal of Amneris in *Aïda* as “one of the best of all time,” dubbing her appearance at Booth’s Theatre in New York in the 1878-1879 season “a revelation of the greatness” of the singer.<sup>98</sup> Like Wiggin, Cary was born and raised in the state of Maine. Furthermore, Cary had associations with the Usher family of Hollis, the town in which Wiggin spent most of her childhood. The Ushers had shared some of Wiggin’s youthful correspondence with the singer. It was one of these letters, in which Wiggin’s youthful theatrical fervor was evident, that first drew Cary’s attention

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>98</sup> George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* Volume X: 1875-1879 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 368, 575.

to her. Having just witnessed a traveling company perform a now-forgotten entertainment, Wiggin wrote to the Ushers, “What a thrilling thing to die on the stage with everybody weeping over you and angels on ropes coming down from the ceiling to carry you to heaven!”<sup>99</sup> In *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin gives voice to Cary’s invitation to join her for an extended visit while the Strakosch’s Opera Company was performing in San Francisco. While the direct impetus for the invitation is subject to conjecture, Wiggin characterized it as such:

Arriving in California with the first grand opera company that had ever visited San Francisco, she [Cary] asked a friend: “Where is that young girl—Kate Somebody—who used to write letters to the Usher family in Hollis? I have heard them read many a time. She is very fond of music, and I dare say has never seen an opera in her life. I’m going to have her up here. Find out where she lives and I will do the rest.”<sup>100</sup>

It is unclear whether this is a conversation that was recorded as such, or a construct of Wiggin’s memoir. Regardless, Cary did send an invitation and made travel arrangements for Wiggin to spend four weeks in San Francisco as her guest.

Wiggin, who heretofore had been in demand as a pianist and singer for local amateur events, suddenly found herself participating at the fringes of professional performers’ lives. Her time in San Francisco with Cary and the opera company gave Wiggin a unique viewpoint of the world of the professional performer in the Postbellum period. Not only was Wiggin a social companion to Miss Cary, but she also participated in the toil of everyday operatic life. In her autobiography, Wiggin noted, “I attended all the rehearsals for orchestra, chorus or principals. In fact I lived in the opera house except for meals and grudged even the time for these, save for the

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Agnes Snyder, *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education 1856-1931*, (Washington DC: Association for Childhood Education International, 1972), 96.

<sup>100</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 69.

private company dinners which were at three in the afternoon on opera nights.”<sup>101</sup>

Wiggin clearly developed a working knowledge of theatrical life during her time with Cary, and made contacts through Cary that would prove useful both in terms of future business connections, and in regards to how she shaped her public performance of identity later in life. While Wiggin chose not to become a professional performer, she employed the knowledge and skills she gained in how she crafted roles for herself in the public sphere.

It is noteworthy that while “An Operatic Friendship” is ostensibly a chapter about Cary and Wiggin’s association with her, it also reveals a great deal about the frame through which Wiggin viewed herself. Wiggin’s abiding passion for and understanding of the theatrical, and its early and extended influence on Wiggin’s career choices, were clearly evident throughout the chapter. Of the four or five significant vignettes Wiggin recounts, three of them focus not on Cary’s oeuvre, but on Wiggin’s own capacity to perform. Two of these events are worth quoting at length as examples of how Wiggin reached back into her past to build an argument for why she chose vocations and avocations that relied on the theatrical.

Both of these revelations occur near the end of Wiggin’s stay in San Francisco and within the context of a birthday celebration for Wiggin. As a special treat for her, it was arranged for Wiggin and other friends of Miss Cary to appear onstage in a dancing scene in *The Masked Ball*, one of the operas in the company’s repertory.

Wiggin described the performance at length:

My long visit ended in a blaze of glory, for Mr. Strakosch [the opera’s impresario], when the week’s repertory was announced, allowed me to choose the opera for my birthday treat. I selected “The Masked Ball,” because many

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 71.

friends of Miss Kellogg and Miss Cary were “going on” in the dancing scene, for the fun of the thing. We were all disguised in dominos and masks, but I could not convince myself that every eye in the opera house was not riveted on ME, and, after once circling the stage in a semi-comatose condition, I forsook the gay throng to hide myself in Miss Cary’s dressing room.<sup>102</sup>

Despite being one of the masked and costumed crowd in the scene, Wiggin was overwhelmed by the occasion. Wiggin may have used this episode, in which she characterized herself as both drawn to the glamour of stage life and overwhelmed by the pressure of performing for an audience, to create coherence between her love of public life and the toll her public performances would eventually take on her. Years afterward, the wear and tear of public speaking would often leave her in a similar condition, unable to meet the demands of continuous public performance.

Her stage fright would not be quelled that night, however. Later that evening at a birthday dinner in her honor, amidst much “singing of an informal sort,” Cary determined to hear Wiggin sing. Wiggin recalled Cary encouraging her to “sing some little thing” for the gathering. In Wiggin’s account of the moment, Cary created a performative frame for the younger woman by pointing to the fact that it was not a performance in the same vein as *The Masked Ball*. In her recollection, Wiggin had Cary cajoling her to the piano to sing, promising that “Mr. Strakosch isn’t engaging any new artists! This isn’t an ‘audition,’ my dear. Nothing hangs upon it!”<sup>103</sup> Wiggin’s singing experience at this juncture occurred in the liminal space between two worlds, that of the parlor, and that of the stage; for the audience transcends the familial audience of the parlor, despite the relative safety of the act of performing in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

such a private venue. While Cary assured Wiggin that her singing was not an “audition,” it still served as a performance for the crowd of professional performers.

Given such an audience, Wiggin described the trepidation with which she undertook her command performance for Cary:

I tottered, rather than walked, to the piano, consoled by this extraordinarily chastening introduction; hardly knowing how I could demonstrate my “common sense,” though sure of my ability to live down to her description of my voice. An impertinent idea came to me, to sing a favorite encore of Miss Cary’s, “The Cows are Coming Home,” with as much of her well-known manner as I could muster on short notice....I transposed the song to as low a key as I dared, and my somewhat irreverent imitation of my dear prima donna, especially in the lines that always caused a flow of tears in the audience, was thought so creditable that all laughed heartily, and she, after kissing my cheek, gave me a sound shaking by way of reproof.<sup>104</sup>

In this excerpt, Wiggin characterized herself as someone who understood her role in this social circle; she understood that she was simultaneously an outsider and a novelty amongst Cary’s world, and through her parody of the singer’s performance, capitalized on those aspects of her persona that she felt would give her the most cultural capital with the group. Wiggin steadfastly asserts that her performance for Cary and the other members of the opera company was not an audition, yet she uses this moment in her autobiography to draw connections to other performative aspects public persona that thread through her life.

Wiggin’s time with Cary’s company was fruitful for the young woman; Wiggin learned not only the rudiments of acting as a profession, but the importance and value of incorporating those skills into public life. Cary influenced Wiggin’s understanding of professional associations, as well. Wiggin wrote that she could see that Cary’s “rather unique conviction that her steady growth had come from being

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

pitted against superior artists at the outset and obliged from loyalty as well as self-respect, to do her level best with such powers as had been entrusted to her, impressed me tremendously.”<sup>105</sup>

By including this vivid description in her autobiography, Wiggin created an opportunity to make several connections between autobiographical presentations of her disparate identities. When she constructed a version of her younger self as hesitant performer, Wiggin inscribed her identity within a conservative construct of middle-class feminine behavior that allowed for such performative displays in the private sphere, but were still problematized behavior in the public sphere. She even went so far as to describe her parlor performance as “impertinent” and “irreverent,” minimizing its importance as a performance in and of itself. However, her inclusion in the recollection of her life also allows connections to be forged between her childhood and her adulthood via similar irreverent comic satires of music, opera, and performance.

Before Wiggin ventured into satirical performance, however, she embraced amateur performance opportunities. While Wiggin felt that “This operatic experience with Annie Louise Cary gave me a view of the hitherto unknown side of the footlights and induced intense interest” within her of a life in the theatre and opera, she “was not intoxicated by it.”<sup>106</sup> Still, upon her return to her family in Santa Barbara, it was assumed by local society that she had received the best education in performance imaginable simply by being in Cary’s constant presence. Wiggin resumed her “girlhood gayeties,” and briefly mentioned participating in what she

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 77.

termed “private theatricals,” presumably parlor entertainments in the homes of friends and family, or charitable endeavors within the community. Wiggin noted particularly that “the community took a lively interest in W. D. Howells’s brief dramatic sketches suitable for amateurs, and I had been cast for the verbose, light-hearted (and lighter-headed!) heroines of *The Register*, *The Parlor Car*, and *The Sleeping Car*.”<sup>107</sup> Wiggin felt that, through her experiences with the opera company, she “learned a little about ordinary stage routine by watching good and bad exits, stiff and graceful gestures, natural and theatrical poses, and a dozen other practical factors in an artist’s profession.”<sup>108</sup> These stage routines she “promptly put into effect in my first appearance in amateur theatricals after my return to Santa Barbara. Four weeks with Annie Louise Cary were supposed to be worth four years in a dramatic school, and there was some thought of trying ‘Camille’ in order to give me an opportunity.”<sup>109</sup> Wiggin then characterized this amateur performance as “a pretentious affair for charity in Lobero’s adobe theater,” and while for a good, if long forgotten cause, Wiggin used the recollection of this performance to focus on the ways the act of performing affected her:

There is no record that the theatrical world was shaken by my performance: but the breathless joy with which I passed hours of rehearsal in the damp, stuffy, adobe theater; the light feet with which I trod the dusty floor of the dim, murky wings; the positive ecstasy that flooded my being when I slipped off my own personality and dress, and slipped on that of the somewhat attractive but wholly imbecile “Mary”—all these sensations meant something of which I was then unconscious.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 78.

The “positive ecstasy” with which she recalled approaching her role, and the “breathless joy” that she experienced in rehearsals helped Wiggin characterize her public persona as an inspired and energetic performer. However, it is the line in which she alluded to “something of which I was then unconscious” that Wiggin used to leave open the possibility of public performance as part of her presentation of self in the future. This lack of conscious effort or approach to her amateur theatricals stands in contrast to the conscious framing of her impromptu parody of Annie Louise Cary discussed earlier.

The carefree, innocent times of the amateur theatricals were soon to end. Wiggin’s stepfather’s death coincided with the collapse of the California land speculation boom, and the family had minimal income to support themselves and pay the mortgages on the property Dr. Bradbury had accumulated. Wiggin was just twenty years old when she was forced to find employment to support her mother and siblings. While Wiggin had developed a reputation locally as an excellent amateur actress, and entertained the possibility of choosing the theatre as a career, Wiggin chose the socially acceptable position of educator over the more precarious future of an actress. Despite all of the attractions to the theatre, Wiggin chose a different path, and framed herself in a new way despite the precipice of the stage to which she had come so close. In fact, shortly after Wiggin had established herself as a kindergarten teacher in the slums of San Francisco, she was introduced by Cary to the impresario Dion Boucicault, then on a Western tour with his company.

As mentioned earlier, Wiggin had performed in amateur theatricals in Santa Barbara, as well as at a week-long charity event in San Francisco in which she played



lead roles in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Yet in writing of her early attachment to the theatre in her autobiography, Wiggin downplayed her own acting ability and glossed over Boucicault's interest in her talent. Instead, she focused on the visits that Boucicault's actors and Cary's fellow singers made to her kindergarten, for while "the voice-production of infants from four to six years old would not be interesting to an opera singer, and the dramatic features of a child's game might well strike an accomplished actor as a trifle weak; nevertheless, they were fascinated with the little people and with the novelty of the work itself."<sup>111</sup> Through this recollection, Wiggin continuously established her own position—first as "semi-professional" actor, then as educator. However, Wiggin then further described Boucicault's concern that she was "overtaxed, physically and nervously," and that her "natural gifts...were being wasted on the exacting labor" of running the kindergarten.<sup>112</sup> His solution, according to Wiggin? Boucicault offered her the part of Moya in *The Colleen Bawn* and Kate in *Kerry* on his tour. While the offer tempted Wiggin, her reply to the impresario (again, according to her remembrance of the event), was, "Thank you very much, but there are ever so many people to do Moya and Kate, but for the moment none to play my part here."<sup>113</sup> Here, Wiggin shaped her performance of her past self in theatrical terms by invoking her own theatrical past:

Here and there, now and then, first and last, I have stood on the brink of a totally different career from the one I finally followed. Dazzling glimpses of a life, for which in some ways I had a sort of rudimentary fitness, have appeared to me as I trod the long trail that winds into the land of dreams; but I always ended by voluntarily choosing the quieter, sometimes even the wearier path,

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 137-138.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 139.

as the once for which my feet were shod, the that God meant me to tread. The “nightingale” has sung and the “white moon” has always gleamed for me, nevertheless, when the scene may have seemed very drab and very barren to the casual onlooker. It is not always in gold days, but in gray ones, that the soul grows and the purpose of life unfolds.<sup>114</sup>

In this quotation, Wiggin again constructs herself, using the terms “quieter” and “wearier,” framing her choices as God’s will, an inevitability. Nonetheless, each step on the path away from the stage was her own decision, her own choice, and her own construct.

### **“Vistas of New Delight”:<sup>115</sup> Music, Impression Management and Acts of Self-Expression**

One striking performative aspect of these transitional chapters from *My Garden of Memory* is the presence of music and musical performance in Wiggin’s early years. Strains of music can be heard throughout the early chapters on her childhood, in which she noted her time spent studying music at a neighbor’s house, and how the “pleasure-palace” of Miss Rumery’s home, and its “old-fashioned Hallett & Cumston mahogany piano, with its tinkling keys, opened vistas of new delight to my rather sensitive ear.”<sup>116</sup> Both in terms of the habit of study and its ubiquitous presence in the household, music in these chapters about her teenage years transitions from that of the intimate social spheres of the parlor and the church to the greater stage of the opera houses of San Francisco.

The subtlety of the inclusion of music in Wiggin’s reminiscences of her childhood in *My Garden of Memory* speaks to its presence as a deeply-rooted aspect

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 16.

of everyday middle-class life in the era. Cultural historians such as Lawrence Levine, Karen Halttunen, and Thomas Schlereth have all examined the influence of music on nineteenth-century American society in some manner, acknowledging the cultural capital of music both as parlor entertainment and as a locus for public gathering. Indeed, middle-class children's activities in the era often included lessons in music and performance as a mark of respectability. While Levine's work tends to focus more on the public presentation of music, and attendance at symphonic and operatic performances, Halttunen acknowledges that the parlor was an equally important locus for musical performance, and that "the central function of the laws of polite social geography was to establish the parlor as the stage upon which the genteel performances were enacted."<sup>117</sup> The centrality of the parlor as a private performance venue was pervasive in the nineteenth century.

In his study of American Victorianism, Daniel Walker Howe points to the importance of the home in maintaining the cultural hierarchy of nineteenth-century America:

Of course the most important locus for cultural transmission in Victorian society was the home, and the Victorians acknowledged this with their cult of domesticity. The home was conceived as an orderly and secure place where children were indoctrinated with the proper values before being sent forth to make their way in a rapidly changing world.<sup>118</sup>

This "indoctrination" of the household was often reinforced via conduct books and etiquette manuals that offered instruction not only in the appropriate morals and virtues, but in the transmission of these through performance in the home.

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<sup>117</sup> Karen Halttunen, 102.

<sup>118</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture." Special Issue: Victorian Culture in America. *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (December 1975): 519.

However, conduct manuals, such as the widely-popular *Manners; or, Happy Homes and Good Society*, authored by *Godey's Lady's Book* editor Sarah J. Hale, were less likely to offer instruction on how to conduct musical concerts or private theatricals, and more likely to emphasize the home as “the centre of happiness, usefulness, and intelligence.”<sup>119</sup> Serial publications like *Godey's Lady's Book* reinforced the home and the parlor as a site of instruction, and musical instruction in particular, as necessary for the growth and development of proper children:

Music is now so much the necessity of life...that it seems but reasonable to expect parents who have the means should educate into some sensibility the musical taste and judgment of their children who have not been endowed by nature in this respect...a certain amount of teaching would give them *some* of that enjoyment which the majority of the world finds in concerts and similar entertainments.<sup>120</sup>

*Godey's Lady's Book* implied that parents should invest in the musical education of their children in order to ensure they can function within a cultural hierarchy that places a certain degree of importance on a shared understanding of musical literacy. In particular, the publication held that “music was considered one of the ladylike accomplishments—one of the social arts.”<sup>121</sup> In current scholarship on popular music in nineteenth-century America there is an acknowledged emphasis on music as a status of upward-mobility; in “Studying Nineteenth-Century Popular Song,” Paul Charosh points to how the growing middle class “used the piano and its associated music as status symbols...binding loose sheet music into volumes and creating

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<sup>119</sup> Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, *Manners; or Happy Homes and Good Society All The Year Round*. (Boston: J. E. Tilton and Company, 1868, rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1972), 115-116.

<sup>120</sup> “Editor’s Table: Music,” *Godey's Lady's Book*, 61, no. 5 (November 1860): 462. Quoted in Julia Eklund Koza “Music Instruction in the Nineteenth-Century: Views from *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1830-1877,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* Vol. 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1990): 245-257.

<sup>121</sup> Koza, 249.

scrapbooks of song broadsides” as evidence of music’s import in the consolidation of the middle class.<sup>122</sup>

Middle-class families like Wiggin’s, particularly in the New England of her childhood, often developed private parlor performances for extended families and neighbors that not only “provided entertainment” but “reinforced social roles, and contributed to the establishment and maintenance of a cultural identity.”<sup>123</sup> This was certainly the case in Wiggin’s family; one extract from the ten-year-old Wiggin’s diary that she released for publication in *Ladies Home Journal* detailed the daily routine of her childhood that speaks to the influence of music in the household. At the close of her entry dated March 25, the young Wiggin wrote: “After supper Mother played for Father and me to dance by, and then I for Father and Mother. We sang a little while, and then went to bed; had a dance in our nightgowns first.”<sup>124</sup> The mention of music and dancing, in addition to the several references to practicing the piano for a half hour every morning and again in the evening points to the pervasiveness of music in her early years.

Smith reinforces Wiggin’s persona performance by building upon Wiggin’s love of and aptitude for music in her later biography, noting that when the community gathered for evenings of music in one of the neighbor’s parlors, Wiggin was “in especial request, for she was a natural musician, and not only a student of music, but possessed to the end of her days the precious gift of straying, as it were, to the piano in the firelight, or dusk of evening, and weaving the threads of old melodies, grave

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<sup>122</sup> Paul Charosh, “Studying Nineteenth-Century Popular Song” *American Music*, Vol. 15, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 478.

<sup>123</sup> Jennifer C. Post, *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life, 1870-1940*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>124</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “When I Was a Little Girl,” *Ladies Home Journal*, (April 1915): 10.

and gay, into a magical, many-colored carpet that transported her hearers into far lands of reverie and recollection.”<sup>125</sup> According to Smith, Wiggin exhibited musical skills at an early age, as “she had, from childhood, a touch upon the keys that thrilled their sensitive wires, a throb in her voice whenever she sang, or whenever she read aloud, that brought swift tears, were the hearers at all susceptible.”<sup>126</sup> Smith extended the autobiographical conceit begun in *My Garden of Memory* and aided Wiggin’s impression management by using the same source material the sister had gathered while Wiggin was writing her autobiography. In addition, Smith reinforced Wiggin’s attempt to form a complete and coherent expression of self by drawing connections through the diverse aspects of performance she incorporated and exhibited throughout her life.

Rather than following the same sort of structure as the other forms of impression management discussed throughout this chapter, music’s role in Wiggin’s autobiography offers an intriguing counterpoint to the discussion. While Wiggin included many short vignettes of her childhood that featured music, she failed to firmly establish the connection between her musical inclinations as a child and her adult publication and presentation of music. Wiggin wrote a number of songs throughout adult life, most of which were written for inclusion in her educational work and were published as *Kindergarten Chimes* and *Hymns for Kindergarteners*. In addition, she wrote burlesques of popular songs, including “Oh, Susanna!” and

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<sup>125</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, 12.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

crafted her version to address the friends who gathered near her summer home in Maine.<sup>127</sup>

However, two significant musical endeavors receive scant attention in her autobiography: the publication of *Nine Love Songs and a Carol* in 1896, and *Bluebeard, a Musical Fantasy* in 1914. The first of these is mentioned briefly in passing as one of a productive publication spell in 1895-1896, when six of her works reached publication.<sup>128</sup> Oddly, this reference occurred in a chapter titled, “Dinners to Celebrities” and bore no further reference to music. The only other reference to *Nine Love Songs and a Carol* came in the context of establishing her relationship with her second husband, George C. Riggs. In “An Ocean Romance,” she digressed from her account of her courtship and marriage, and inserted a recollection of going to Wellesley College to perform a reading of her work, and being serenaded by the Glee Club. The following morning, she “taught them from the manuscript of my newly composed ‘Plantation Christmas Carol’; first the words (Mrs. Ruth McEnery Stuart’s) and then my own music.”<sup>129</sup> The acknowledgement of her ability to compose music is so understated in her autobiography that it becomes negligible—and creates a tension between the childhood self Wiggin created for her readership and the adult self looking back in time. Rather than forging links between her acts of self-expression via music, in this instance she drew the connection to the performance context of the public speaking engagement that took her to Wellesley in the first place. The singing

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<sup>127</sup> Hand-written lyrics. Courtesy of The Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>128</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 292.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 272.

merely served to highlight what she professed was her last appearance on the public platform.<sup>130</sup>

Unlike *Nine Love Songs and a Carol*, *Bluebeard* is not a musical composition in the traditional sense. Rather, it served as a parody of a recital-lecture format popularized by Walter Damrosch, the conductor of several New York opera companies and societies. Damrosch rose to prominence by assuming the role of conductor of Wagner's *Die Walküre* at the Metropolitan Opera House upon his father's sudden death in 1884. Damrosch's recital-lectures served to educate middle-class audiences about symphonic and operatic music, and he was particularly known for his ability to "show most picturesquely the connection between the drama and the musical method of its embodiment."<sup>131</sup> The most prominent feature of these lecture-recitals was Damrosch's own ability to make these connections while playing examples on the piano for the audience; his skill was most prominent when "he unfolded the structures of scores with a simplicity of manner, a clarity of explication and a happy style of speech that won his hearers immediately."<sup>132</sup> It was this style and manner that inspired Wiggin to write her "nonsensical burlesque of a Wagner lecture-recital" for friends one evening.<sup>133</sup> In her autobiography, Wiggin again shifted the performance construct so that the lecture-recital was less about music and its role in her life, and more about a kind of performance that extended beyond the musical. The emphasis in her recollection is not on the fact that she wrote the libretto and music based on the fantastic story of *Bluebeard*; instead, the focus of her recollection

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>131</sup> W. J. Henderson, "Walter Damrosch," *The Musical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (January 1932): 5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 217.



is on her performance of the piece as after-dinner entertainment, and its overwhelmingly positive reception among her friends.

*Bluebeard* and *Nine Love Songs and a Carol* do not exemplify the same direct connections between performative aspects of Wiggin's youth and the various roles she gave herself as an adult. Instead, they serve as evidence of the overlapping performances modes that Wiggin employed. By engaging in autobiography, Wiggin employed "vocabularies of the self...to present a praiseworthy self to their audiences" and justify a reading of how she managed her public performance that diverges from a linear, chronological perspective and embraces an examination of the multi-layered performance of identity that Wiggin deployed throughout her autobiography.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Bjorklund, 159.

## Chapter 2: “It is His Impulse to Create that should Gladden

Thee”<sup>135</sup>: Creativity, Play, and Wiggin’s Role in the Free

### Kindergarten Movement

It had been a long, wearisome day at the Free Kindergarten, and I was alone in the silent, deserted room. Gone were all the little heads, yellow and black, curly and smooth; the dancing, restless, curious eyes; the too mischievous, naughty, eager hands and noisy feet; the merry voices that had made the great room human, but now left it quiet and empty. Eighty pairs of tiny boots had clattered down the stairs; eighty baby woes had been relieved; eighty little torn coats pulled on with patient hands; eighty shabby little hats, not one with a “strawberry mark” to distinguish it from any other, had been distributed with infinite discrimination among their possessors; numberless sloppy kisses had been pressed upon a willing cheek or hand, and another day was over.<sup>136</sup>

While this description is found in the opening of one of Kate Douglas Wiggin’s earliest published texts, it could have just as readily described her own harried days when she oversaw the Silver Street Kindergarten in San Francisco. When Wiggin and her family found themselves without sufficient means to support themselves, Wiggin in turn found that the kindergarten movement was gaining momentum in the United States. This momentum afforded her the opportunity not only to earn an income to help support her mother and siblings, but also to provide a context within which Wiggin could explore performance and play as keys to early identity formation and education.

Based on the precepts of Friedrich Froebel’s kindergarten philosophy, the Free Kindergarten Movement provided Wiggin with a venue that helped shape her

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<sup>135</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *The Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Froebel’s Mother Play*, trans. Henrietta Robins Mack Eliot and Susan Elizabeth Blow (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 273.

<sup>136</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *The Story of Patsy* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), 1-2.

performance of self not only as a young adult, but throughout her life. Froebel's tenets, which built on notions of imitation, creativity, and play as necessary means to marry a child's natural, physical self with his or her spiritual self modeled for Wiggin an identity performance technique that enabled her to "reconstruct the unity of a life across time."<sup>137</sup> The unified reconstruction of the ardent if naïve Froebelian disciple and advocate that Wiggin created in some versions of her expression of self were occasionally countered by the rhetorical tactics she utilized to secure the success of Silver Street Kindergarten and the Kindergarten Training School she founded.

In this chapter, I examine Wiggin's construction of her self-as-educator, and her management of simultaneous iterations of this identity. Wiggin framed her experience as a kindergartener in two ways: both as an impressionable and ardent acolyte of the great German educational philosopher, and as an educational philanthropist who operated within the shifting estimations of women's public position in nineteenth-century America.<sup>138</sup> In order to examine how Wiggin performed these personas to her benefit, I first provide a brief sketch of Froebel and the cultural and philosophical milieu of early nineteenth-century Germany that influenced the formation of his kindergarten philosophy. Then I offer an overview of the basic tenets of his pedagogy, followed by an examination of its adoption into the American educational system. This contextual information is vital to understanding my examination and analysis of Wiggin's entry into the field of early childhood education, and her impulse to create a dual frame for her performance of self.

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<sup>137</sup> Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" in James Olney's *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 37.

<sup>138</sup> While the term kindergartener now commonly refers to the young student in the kindergarten, the original use of the term referred to those who taught in the kindergarten environment.

## **“Come, Let us Live with Our Children”; Friedrich Froebel and the advent of the Kindergarten<sup>139</sup>**

Friedrich Froebel was widely regarded as the creator of the philosophy and pedagogy behind the kindergarten movement, which “advanced the rather revolutionary theory that young children should be happy in school instead of miserable” and was based theoretically on his own early childhood experiences and observations.<sup>140</sup> Those that proved most influential to the kindergarten movement occurred outside the traditional educational environment. Froebel was one of several children whose father served as a dogmatic minister in rural Germany, and who, soon after his mother’s death and his father’s remarriage, found himself at the age of about four spending much of his early years removed from the company of his peers and without the guidance of adults beyond the strict admonishments of his father’s sermons to be good or face the fires of hell. Much of Froebel’s early life was spent in the gardens of his father’s parsonage, trying to remain unobtrusive; later in his life, Froebel would point to the garden as the site in which he began unconsciously to form his ideas about education by observing the natural environment. As one biographer stated, “the flowers and weeds, the beetles and ants beneath him and the sun and the rain, the birds and the fleeting clouds above him, became his trusted friends. A friendship developed which lasted all his life and which formed the basis for his educational ideas, for...he believed that the ‘laws of nature are also the laws of

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<sup>139</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, trans. Josephine Jarvis (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 3.

<sup>140</sup> Alice Fleming, *Great Women Teachers* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1965), 52.

education.”<sup>141</sup> Indeed, once Froebel left the confines of the parsonage garden to further his education, he first served as a forestry apprentice, and then joined one of his brothers at the university in Jena where he studied several subjects, including botany, math, natural history, and the natural sciences.<sup>142</sup> It was the interconnectedness of all of these areas of study that Froebel found most compelling, and which served as the foundation for the development of his educational system.

Froebel was also heavily influenced by Johann Pestalozzi, whose infant schools gained prominence in Switzerland in the early part of the nineteenth century.<sup>143</sup> While studying architecture in Frankfurt, Froebel began teaching in a school that espoused Pestalozzi’s principles, principles that denoted early childhood education as “the only means of effective social reform and harmony.”<sup>144</sup> Shortly thereafter, Froebel had the opportunity to meet the man he considered “his spiritual father in educational matters,” and as Froebel continued to develop his educational theories, he married some of Pestalozzi’s tenets to his own to great effect.<sup>145</sup> Of Pestalozzi’s work, Froebel found particularly useful the idea of combining the fluidity of structure within the educational setting that addressed varying levels of students’ skills and knowledge sets through the concept of “self-activity” with the spiritual understanding that he borrowed first from his own religious background.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Joachim Liebschner, *A Child’s Work: Freedom and Play in Froebel’s Educational Theory and Practice*, (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>143</sup> For more information on Pestalozzi and the modernization of early childhood educational methods, see Kate Silber’s *Pestalozzi, the Man and his Work* (London: Routledge, 1960).

<sup>144</sup> Caroline Winterer, “Avoiding the ‘Hothouse System of Education’: Nineteenth-Century Early Childhood Education from the Infant Schools to the Kindergartens,” *History of Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 292.

<sup>145</sup> Liebschner, 7.

<sup>146</sup> Liebschner, 5.

These philosophies paralleled to a certain degree the idealistic underpinnings of the German transcendentalists who were philosophizing during the same era. The philosophical treatises of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel both exerted influence on Froebel. Fichte's espousal of transcendental idealism's ability "to reconcile human freedom and natural necessity, moral sentiments and rational judgments, 'feelings' and 'thoughts'" significantly overlapped the ideas of Froebel's *Education of Man*.<sup>147</sup> In addition, Hegel's understanding of logic as a "system of pure reason" that is "truth as it is without a veil and in its own absolute nature" informed Froebel's own systemic approach to education.<sup>148</sup> Froebel's approach also acknowledged Hegel's phenomenology of the spiritual. Ultimately, many of the German philosophers of the era were struggling with the scientific and the spiritual, and the systems of human and natural development that embraced both. Froebel, with the fundamental concept of self-activity and self-creation as a "rendering of the inner outer" at the core of his precepts, placed the kindergarten squarely within this philosophical milieu.<sup>149</sup>

### **"Activity in Harmony with Feeling and Perception": The basic tenets of**

### **Froebel's *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten***<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte and Schilling: The Jena Period," in *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Marie Higgins (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 142.

<sup>148</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), 31. For more information, see Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Marie Higgins' *The Age of German Idealism*, which features several chapters outlining Hegel's philosophies.

<sup>149</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Education by Development*, trans. Josephine Jarvis (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 61.

<sup>150</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, 23.

The study of children and their development consumed Froebel for most of his life, and led to the publication of several lengthy treatises on the subject, including *The Education of Man* (1826), *The Pedagogics of Kindergarten* (1861), *Education by Development* (1861), which served as a continuation of *The Pedagogics*, and the more practical training text *Mother's Songs, Games and Stories* (1843), which apply Froebel's theories to specific tasks grounded in play.<sup>151</sup> Taken together, this oeuvre covered a wide range of developmental ideas that Froebel developed primarily from observations of children in learning environments and at play. Throughout the almost thirty-year span of his studies and teachings, several components were central to his educational theories.

Unlike Pestalozzi's earlier work establishing the infant-schools, the foundation for most of the Froebelian concepts is ultimately spiritual in nature: his *The Education of Man* built upon the precept that

In all things there lives and reigns an eternal law....This law has been and is enounced with equal clearness and distinctness in nature (the external), in the spirit (the internal), and in life which unites the two. This all-controlling law is necessarily based on an all-pervading, energetic, living, self-conscious, and hence eternal Unity.<sup>152</sup>

While Froebel further stated that "Unity is God," his work did not espouse a specific religion.<sup>153</sup> Rather, Froebel's emphasis was on educating and training both the nature and the spirit of a child simultaneously, and moving away from a mechanical, rote sense of learning to one that developed freely based on the inclinations of the child. Froebel believed that since "It is the innermost desire and need of a vigorous, genuine

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<sup>151</sup> Both *The Pedagogics of Kindergarten* and *Education by Development* were collected essays published posthumously by Wichard Lange, and made available in English translation by Josephine Jarvis in 1897.

<sup>152</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 1.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

boy to understand his own life, to get a knowledge of its nature, its origin, and outcome,” creating an environment wherein a child could develop this knowledge experientially was key to facilitating that self-knowledge and understanding.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, Froebel felt that “education must develop man’s essential nature. It must make him consciously accept and freely realize the divine power which activates him. It should lead him to perceive and know the divine as it is manifested in his natural surroundings.”<sup>155</sup> While scholars have struggled to situate Froebel’s spirituality in a Christian context, this aspect of Froebel’s philosophy it is easier to explain when examined performatively.

Underneath Froebel’s emphasis on spirituality is the precept of creativity and creating. In his *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, Froebel characterized humanity in terms of its creation:

Considering man as a created being, it is also quite indispensable to regard and treat him, even in childhood as well as through his whole life, as a creative being, and to train and prepare him so that, while himself creating, he may, even from his earliest years, find and recognize the Creator, the creation, and the created, and may thus find and recognize himself in this threefold relation and connection according to the measure of his increasing capacity.<sup>156</sup>

Froebel placed the focus of childhood on the creation (the child) and the process of creating (the child’s development). In addition, he characterized the learning process as one of self-activity and self-creation, acknowledging that each child had the opportunity to create his or her own personae. Froebel reinforced his concept of self-creation through analogy:

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<sup>154</sup> Friedrich Froebel, “The Education of Man” in *The Origins of Nursery Education, Volume I* trans. W. N. Hailmann (London: Routledge, 2001), 305.

<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Froebel, “The Education of Man” in *Friedrich Froebel, a Selection from his Writings*, ed. Irene M. Lilly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 50.

<sup>156</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, 9-10.



Is it then to be supposed that in the human child the capacity, the talent for becoming a whole complete human being, is contained less than in the acorn is contained the capacity to become a strong, vigorous, complete oak?...does not the child bear also within himself the whole man and the whole life of humanity?<sup>157</sup>

Here, Froebel posited that the potential of a child's development was inherent in the child. However, Froebel in no way espoused that a child's capacity was predetermined; his work and studies of children led him to believe that "Man is only what he makes himself to be. Man can make himself only that which ideally he is. Through activity he creates himself. In activity he reveals himself."<sup>158</sup> Hence, while the potential resided in the child, it was the child's actions that determined how that potential developed. To encourage the independent development of this potential, Froebel focused on young children's development through imitation and play. Froebel argued that carefully nurturing a child's imitative and creative abilities through games and make-believe provide the fundamental skills necessary for a child to grow into a productive member of society.

While play and performativity thread through much of Froebel's philosophy, they are most clearly formulated in his practical writing about the work he undertook as an educator. In these texts, Froebel moved away from a discussion of the spiritual, and toward specific examples of children's educational play. He argued that a child's forms of play "imply inner life and vigor—an actual external life. Where this is lacking, there can not be true play which, itself full of genuine life, can arouse, feed, and elevate life."<sup>159</sup> Froebel posited that without imaginative play and make-believe,

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>158</sup> Susan E. Blow, *Letters to a Mother on the Philosophy of Froebel*. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 48-49.

<sup>159</sup> Friedrich Froebel, "The Education of Man" in *The Origins of Nursery Education, Volume I*, 303.

children would be unable to attain the full potential of their humanity. To encourage forms of play that would engender the “commitment or obligation” which existed in a child’s recreation and could then be transformed to fruitful work endeavors in later life, Froebel created two basic educational tools that connected basic learning to concepts of play and performance: gifts and occupations.<sup>160</sup>

Froebel’s gifts were objects and toys that were already often part of a child’s recreational life, imbued with intent and pedagogical meaning. By giving a child a simple object, one that “expresses stability and yet movability” and that can manifest the unity of spiritual and physical self that Froebel found necessary to human development, he argued that a child could develop an understanding of “its own self-dependent, stable, and yet movable life.”<sup>161</sup> With that as his goal, Froebel endowed everyday objects like balls and blocks with philosophical meaning, and created exercises, or “occupations,” which could be used to encourage physical, intellectual, and arguably spiritual development in children.

Susan Blow, one of Froebel’s principal disciples in America, characterized Froebel’s practical application of his philosophy as deeply imbedded in performative imitation:

Froebel’s appreciation of the significance of imitative activities is shown even more conclusively in his deed than in his words. All of his games are imitative in the sense that the child repeats a movement or series of movements made by mother or kindergartner. Most of them are also imitative, in the sense that the child either reproduces the activities of persons and things about him, or dramatizes and thus relives events in his own history.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Liebschner, 59.

<sup>161</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, 31.

<sup>162</sup> Susan E. Blow, *Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Froebel’s Mother Play* trans. Susan E. Blow (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), 27.

Susan Blow's summary of Froebel's practical application of his theories clearly defines the performative nature of the kindergarten movement, and the opportunity it offered participants to embrace an active performance mode, given the appropriate gifts.

William T. Harris, the renowned editor of the multivolume International Education Series published in the United States beginning in the 1880s, expressed Froebel's use of gifts and occupations as opportunities for children to develop the skills they would employ in their adult lives, for if "the child plays or 'makes believe' that the ball is a dog or cat or some other animal...a new step in creative activity is reached by the exercise of fancy and imagination," and this act of creation through imitation can correspond to the child's own personal development.<sup>163</sup> By nurturing the essential nature of humanity that existed in children, Froebel sought to "give to mankind all that it needs and seeks in every direction of its tendencies and being."<sup>164</sup> To accomplish this, Froebel developed a system of children's education that he viewed as "*unique* in our time, as *necessary* for it, and as *salutary* for all time."<sup>165</sup> This system is based on the theory that imitation and play lead a child naturally to industry.

While self-activity and independent educational growth are predominant components of Froebel's philosophy, he also identified an integral participant in children's development: the active presence of a mother or mother-figure. As

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<sup>163</sup> W. T. Harris, "Editor's Preface," vi-vii. For further information on Harris and his influence on education in America during the latter half of the nineteenth century, see Harold B. Dunkel's "W. T. Harris and Hegelianism in American Education," *The School Review*, 81, no. 2, The Future of Nonpublic Schools (February 1973), 233-246.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in *The Origins of Nursery Education, Volume I*, trans. W. N. Hailmann (London: Routledge, 2001), xviii.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

Eleonore Heerwart pointed out in her Introduction to Frances Lord's 1920 translation of Froebel's *Mother's Songs, Games and Stories*, Froebel saw it as "his duty to picture the home as it ought to be—not by writing a book of theories and of rules which are easily forgotten, but by accompanying a mother in her daily rounds through house, garden and field; and by following her to workshop, market and church" and thereby developing a utilitarian system of play that could be incorporated into the daily tasks of both mother and child.<sup>166</sup> Froebel positioned the Mother as endowed with the responsibility to "educate a happy coming race" through her children, for she "alone can do it."<sup>167</sup> By placing a significant amount of responsibility for children's education on the mother and, by extension, the home, Froebel sought to ease the transition of the child from the privacy of the home to the public realm, first as exemplified by the school and then beyond the school yard to the community at large. This migration from home to school irresistibly drew followers in other countries where nationalism was on the rise and where women were also making the transition from the private to the public sphere.

### **“Necessity should call forth Freedom”: The Kindergarten Movement and its Advocates in America<sup>168</sup>**

While a thorough scrutiny of the social and political issues which influenced acceptance of Froebel's kindergarten philosophies in German is beyond the scope of

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<sup>166</sup> Eleonore Heerwart, "Introduction" *Friedrich Froebel's Mother's Songs, Games and Stories*, trans. Frances Lord (London: Mr. William Rice, 1920) in *The Origins of Nursery Education: Friedrich Froebel and the English System* Volume V ed. Kevin J. Brehony (London: Routledge, 2001), 29.

<sup>167</sup> Friedrich Froebel, *Mother's Songs*, 154.

<sup>168</sup> Irene M. Lilley, *Friedrich Froebel: A Selection of His Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 55.

this study, a number of key variables made his pedagogy widely appealing in the United States in the nineteenth century.<sup>169</sup> Arguably the most enticing aspect of the movement was that it spoke directly to the role of women in education at a time when women were entering the teaching profession in greater and greater numbers, but were still faced with enormous pressure to maintain the role of women in the private sphere.<sup>170</sup> Even as late as 1894, an article in *Scribner's Magazine* pointed out that “with the increasing facilities for the higher intellectual development now offered to the American woman...the effect which such development would have upon her essential womanliness was bound to become a matter of anxious observation.”<sup>171</sup> The kindergarten and kindergarten training offered American women, and middle-class American women in particular, the opportunity to maintain the “essential womanliness” afforded them by their position in the private sphere, while simultaneously providing a venue in the public sphere that garnered them a degree of economic independence without threatening the boundaries of virtue essential to the performance of middle-class propriety.

Much like the effect of the kindergarten on the young pupils, the teacher training gave young women the freedom to maintain the necessary degree of femininity for social acceptability while moving into the public sphere. While W. T. Harris argued that “perhaps the greatest merit of Froebel’s system is to be found in the fact that it furnishes a deep philosophy for the teachers,” I maintain that Froebel’s

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<sup>169</sup> Arguably, one of the reasons for the rise in kindergartens in America can also be traced to the increased number of German émigrés during the era.

<sup>170</sup> Carol Marie Roland, “The California Kindergarten Movement: A Study in Class and Social Feminism” (1980), XX. See also Carolyn Ann Christenson Saba “Early Progressive Educational Reform: The Kindergarten and Industrial Education Movements in the United States from 1875 to 1890”. Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland College Park, 2000.

<sup>171</sup> Aline Gorren. “Womanliness as a Profession,” *Scribner's Magazine* 15 (May 1894): 610.

theories also offered a useful framework that allowed nineteenth century American women to manage their public performances of self within the intrastiticial space of the kindergarten.<sup>172</sup> As Evelyn Weber notes in *The Kindergarten: Its Encounter with Educational Thought in America*,

The key idea of the Froebelian doctrine of creativeness is to be found in “rendering the inner outer”....Thus the child’s natural tendencies to act and to construct are important tokens of his creative impulse; what he tries to represent and do he begins to understand. Outer reality and his inner presentiments become unified through constructive activity.<sup>173</sup>

Not only did this premise allow for children’s expressive learning and creativity, but it also provided a context for women to justify there position in the public sphere, and in early childhood education: women were merely expressing their inner, spiritual selves through the ‘constructive activity’ of teaching young children.

According to Ann Taylor Allen in “‘Let Us Live with Our Children’: Kindergarten Movements in Germany and the United States, 1840-1914,” Froebel co-opted the maternal aspects of Pestalozzi’s theories and applied them to a sense of nationalism that particularly resonated in the United States in the nineteenth century. Through the development of his kindergarten pedagogy, Froebel integrated the maternalist and the nationalist at an institutional level “by stressing both the public virtues of citizenship and the private virtues expressed through maternal nurture.”<sup>174</sup> The creation of the intrastititial space that was bounded by the kindergarten schools simultaneously provided private and public contexts within which women could

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<sup>172</sup> W. T. Harris, “Editor’s Preface,” *The Education of Man*, trans. W. N. Hailmann (New York: Appleton and Company, 1888), ix.

<sup>173</sup> Evelyn Weber, *The Kindergarten: Its Encounter with Educational Thought in America*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), 6.

<sup>174</sup> Ann Taylor Allen, “‘Let Us Live with Our Children’: Kindergarten Movements in Germany and the United States, 1840-1914,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 28, no. 1 (Spring, 1988): 25.

pursue public forms of self-expression and employment, while remaining true to the ideology of the private sphere, which was to a large degree still circumscribed by the tenets of True Womanhood which espoused “four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”<sup>175</sup> Froebel’s philosophies, which charged women with the function and responsibilities of educators as mothers or potential mothers, was based on virtues similar to those that helped define True Womanhood and employed everyday domestic tasks in many of the children’s occupations.

Women’s position in education in America received additional reinforcement through the metaphorical and rhetorical emphasis on the mother, who stood as the epitome of virtuous True Womanhood. Blow, a major proponent of Froebel’s pedagogy and, along with Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Archibald Smith, one of the foremost American translators his work, emphasized the mother’s role in the educational process of young children through her selection of Froebel’s materials for translation. Her most popular texts included *Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Froebel’s Mother Play*, *Songs and Music of Froebel’s Mother Play*, *Symbolic Education: a Commentary on Froebel’s Mother Play* and *Letters to a Mother on the Philosophy of Froebel*.<sup>176</sup> This focus on women’s responsibility in education allowed women to assume positions of power and authority in the kindergarten movement in America by reviving the post-Revolutionary trope of Republican Motherhood. Froebel’s positioning of maternal duties was strikingly similar to the American ideal of the Republican Mother, whose “life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue”—

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<sup>175</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” *American Quarterly* (Summer, 1966), 152.

<sup>176</sup> Susan E. Blow, *Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Froebel’s Mother Play*, (New York: Appleton, 1895); *Songs and Music of Froebel’s Mother Play*, (New York: Appleton, 1895); and *Symbolic Education: a Commentary on Froebel’s Mother Play* (New York: Appleton, 1895); *Letters to a Mother on the Philosophy of Froebel*, (New York: Appleton, 1899).

a service she affected through the education of her sons.<sup>177</sup> The argument engendered for Republican Motherhood held true for the Mother's of Froebel's kindergartens: if instilling virtue in children was to be part of women's pedagogical role, then "virtue in a woman seemed to require another theater for its display."<sup>178</sup> The tenets of Froebel's kindergarten offered a fortuitous chance for women in America to once again combine their role as educators with a sense of civic duty and helped women like Wiggin mediate their self-expression in more public environs.

The first kindergarten to be established in the United States was founded by Margarethe Schurz, a German émigré who had learned the precepts of Froebel's pedagogy while attending his lectures in Hamburg in 1849. Initially established to educate her children, nieces and nephews, Schurz expanded her teachings beyond her household to include children within her German-speaking community.<sup>179</sup> When Elizabeth Palmer Peabody met Schurz in a chance encounter, Peabody readily saw the possible benefits of integrating the kindergarten system into American education. Peabody was closely associated with the Concord School of Philosophy that included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Mann, and Bronson Alcott, and where she became "absorbed in the techniques of working with children."<sup>180</sup> Impressed by her meeting with Schurz, Peabody continued to explore Froebel's kindergarten techniques, opening the first English-speaking kindergarten with privately raised funds in 1861.<sup>181</sup> While she was instrumental in Wiggin's education in the field, Wiggin's

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<sup>177</sup> Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective" *American Quarterly* 28, no.2 Special Issues: An American Enlightenment (Summer, 1976): 202.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Weber, 18-19.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>181</sup> Fleming, 53.



earliest introduction to kindergarten training came at the invitation of Caroline Severance.

Known as “the Mother of Women’s Clubs,” Severance was also an advocate of Froebel’s kindergarten techniques, and, through her club associations, very active in the Free Kindergarten Movement, which sought to establish kindergarten schools for the working class poor. Severance had relocated to California late in her life, and not only continued her own philanthropic and educational work, but encouraged others to join her. While Wiggin paid homage in *My Garden of Memory* to Severance’s “broad-minded” work, calling her a “born reformer” who “advocated dress reform, low heels, no corsets, new systems of diet, universal suffrage, feminism, single standard of morals, and the economic independence of women,” it was Severance’s advocacy of the philosophy and pedagogy of Froebel that Wiggin came to revere.<sup>182</sup>

Seeing an opportunity to expand the scope of the Kindergarten Movement beyond the East Coast, Severance persuaded Emma Marwedel, one of the foremost German practitioners of Froebel’s techniques to have emigrated to America, to leave the training school she had founded in Washington, D.C., and establish a similar one in southern California. Marwedel had originally been encouraged by Peabody to leave Germany and establish her work in the United States. Marwedel’s first kindergarten training school in California was established in Los Angeles, and had three teachers in training overseeing twenty students.<sup>183</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin was one of those

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<sup>182</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 89-90.

<sup>183</sup> Joint Legislative Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education—Kindergarten Through University, *History and Development of Kindergarten in California*, report prepared by Patricia L. De Cos, California State Legislature, April 2001.

fledgling teachers. This training school, which relocated to Oakland the following year, established the foundation of kindergarten work in California from which all of the development occurred. However, Marwedel never established the public persona that Peabody and Severance secured for themselves, despite having published her own treatises on Froebel's techniques, including *Conscious Motherhood: Or, The Earliest Unfolding of the Child in the Cradle, Nursery, and Kindergarten*, and the more practically-based *Games and Studies in Life Forms and Colors of Nature for Home and School*.<sup>184</sup> When asked to submit her recollection of Marwedel by Harriet Howard of the National College of Education, Wiggin offered clues to this oversight:

Miss Marwedel was an idealist, very impractical, and absolutely destitute of business ability. But she was a noble woman, unselfishly and deeply in love with her vocation. She never lost her German accent, and when she lectured on Mother Play or the metaphysical side of Froebel she was rather vague, but she gave her students a vision of sincerity and truth. As the free kindergarten work developed in California, she was not prominent simply because it was difficult for her to 'get on' with school records and organization. She was not perhaps a great teacher where dull people were considered. They never understood her.<sup>185</sup>

As Wiggin suggests, despite her sincerity and passion of Froebel's teachings, Marwedel's personal success may have been hampered by her poor administrative skills and communication gaps due to her accent. Thus, it was left to Marwedel's students to carry on her work and set the stage for public recognition of the kindergarten's influence in California.

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<sup>184</sup> Emma Marwedel, *Conscious Motherhood: Or, The Earliest Unfolding of the Child in the Cradle, Nursery, and Kindergarten* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1889). *Games and Studies in Life Forms and Colors of Nature for Home and School*, also found on under the title *Childhood's Poetry and Studies, in the Life, Form, and Colours of Nature* (New York: Kenny Publishing, 1888).

<sup>185</sup> Agnes Snyder, *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education 1856-1931*, (Washington DC: Association for Childhood Education International, 1972), 99-100. Letter held in the Archives for Childhood Education International, Washington, DC.

**“More Fortuitous than Deliberate:” Wiggin’s introduction to the Kindergarten Movement<sup>186</sup>**

Peabody, Severance, and Marwedel all played integral roles in Wiggin’s development and training as a kindergartner. Severance set the stage, Marwedel undertook the bulk of the direction, and Peabody provided the transcendental text. These influential and independent women gave Wiggin an education and employment, but also afforded her a behavioral model that allowed her to assume the financial responsibilities of her family without undermining the perception of her propriety. Wiggin, aided by these women who had already forged public identities of their own, managed her public persona as educator by characterizing it as “more fortuitous than deliberate,” and an inadvertent calling to the field.<sup>187</sup>

In the summer of 1877, Wiggin and her family struggled with the burden of debt after the death of her stepfather, who had been their only means of support. Wiggin attempted to provide for the family by providing music lesson and playing the organ for a local church, and received a small windfall when *St. Nicholas* magazine selected her *Half-A-Dozen Housekeepers* for serial publication.<sup>188</sup> However, the income from the ventures was neither stable nor sufficient. At this juncture, Severance offered Wiggin the opportunity to stabilize the family’s fortunes. In her autobiography, Wiggin framed her introduction to Severance and the Free Kindergarten Movement as a chance windfall. She wrote:

At that crucial moment, in the early summer of 1877, came a remarkable woman to Santa Barbara, Mrs. Caroline M. Severance, of Boston, sometimes called the Mother of Women’s Clubs. She had left mountains of accomplished

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<sup>186</sup> Snyder, 97.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 83-85.

work for women in Massachusetts, and at the age of sixty-eight or seventy, perhaps, was on her way with her husband and two sons to make a home and plant an orange grove in Los Angeles. We soon became fast friends, just why I am not quite clear.<sup>189</sup>

Although they differed in age by over fifty years, Severance and Wiggin formed a bond that grew from their shared interests. Severance served as a unique example of Progressive womanhood for young Wiggin, and offered her a model for shaping a public identity that focused on addressing social ills while still providing a viable income.

Severance supported Wiggin's self-framing in her published recollection of their meeting, shortly after the death of Wiggin's stepfather:

Just after this calamity had befallen the family, Mr. Severance and myself were visiting in Santa Barbara and our sons begged me to see Miss Kate and advise with her as to her future, since it was evident that she was to be the bread-winner for the family, for the time at least. Needless to say that I was most happy to do what I could and was won at once by her grace and her charm as well as by her resolute looking of the stern facts full in the face. I invited her to pass the winter with us in Los Angeles and take training in the kindergarten class of Miss Emma Marwedel.<sup>190</sup>

Severance's respect and admiration for the young Wiggin, which emphasized her charm, grace, and resolution, are qualities of Wiggin's persona as educator that Wiggin actively managed throughout her career. Wiggin described her reaction when Severance presented her with the opportunity to study kindergarten education, and support her family as an educator: "If I had been made of tinder and a lighted match

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>190</sup> Elle Giles Ruddy, *The Mother of Clubs: Caroline M. Seymour Severance, and Estimate and Appreciation* (Los Angeles: Baumgardt Publishing Co., 1906), 130.

had been applied to me, I could not have taken fire more easily,” at the prospect of joining the movement.<sup>191</sup>

Wiggin continued to use Severance both as a model and as a justification for the framing of her persona as educator. In *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin related selected portions of a letter Severance sent her, inviting her to join Severance’s search for an appropriate location for Marwedel’s training school in Los Angeles and asking Wiggin to be the school’s first pupil. In the letter, Severance told Wiggin:

The training-school will open at once, even if there is only one pupil, and, my dear Kate, I beseech you to be that one! You were born for this work and are peculiarly fitted to do pioneer service because you are musical, a good storyteller, and fond of children. I have studied you carefully without your knowledge, and at my age I am a fair judge of the necessary requirements. You have the play-spirit in you, but you also love work!<sup>192</sup>

The qualities Severance noted in Wiggin were soon put to good use in the California Kindergarten movement. Upon graduating from Marwedel’s training school, Wiggin returned to Santa Barbara and opened her own private kindergarten, run out of her family’s home on tuition-based funds, which she named “Swallow’s Nest.”

Within about a year however, she was called to San Francisco to help the Free Kindergarten movement, which was “the philanthropic endeavor of many high-minded, socially conscious thinkers of the time who saw in the kindergarten a way of improving the life of the poor and downtrodden and, through an early start with children, of eventually regenerating society.”<sup>193</sup> Seed money was quickly raised, and Wiggin was called upon to lead the Silver Street Kindergarten in the San Francisco

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<sup>191</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 89-90.

<sup>192</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 91.

<sup>193</sup> Snyder, 100.

slum known as Tar Flats. This would be the first free kindergarten west of the Rockies, and served as a model for other kindergartens that quickly sprouted up and down the West Coast. Laura Fisher, another kindergarten teacher of Wiggin's generation, went so far as to claim:

No single individual has done more to spread kindergarten influence and to gain friends for the cause than the author of *The Story of Patsy*. No kindergarten has enjoyed a wider celebrity and achieved greater success among the children and in their homes than the celebrated Silver Street Kindergarten conducted by Mrs. Wiggin and her sister, Nora A. Smith. The work done at Silver Street was the mainspring of all subsequent work in California.<sup>194</sup>

Wiggin had written a story in which the key character of the teacher was clearly autobiographical; the teaching philosophy which this teacher embraced was just as clearly the focus of the Free Kindergarten Movement. As the history of the movement indicates, Wiggin's autobiographical conceit within *The Story of Patsy* became a rallying point for the movement, and Wiggin was suddenly thrust into the philanthropic spotlight, in high demand to speak public as an advocate for the movement.

### **“She was admirably fitted for her work”: Wiggin's Management of her Identity as Educator<sup>195</sup>**

Wiggin's attempt to create a complete and coherent portrait of herself as educator within the frame of both Froebel's educational philosophy and the shifting expectations of American women in public during the nineteenth-century can be analyzed using several different scenarios from her life. While other scholars have

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<sup>194</sup> Nina C. Vandewalker, *The Kindergarten in American Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1908), 104.

<sup>195</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, 41.

mined Wiggin's fiction for a greater understanding of her role in education, I argue that more telling examples of impression management can be extracted from episodes of her time spent as an educator. Wiggin's time in the classroom was comparatively brief; she started "Swallow's Nest" in 1877 and retired from teaching in the kindergarten schools when she married Samuel Bradley Wiggin, her first husband, in 1881.<sup>196</sup> However, the time spent establishing the first free kindergarten west of the Rockies was integral not only to her role as educator, but to the metaperformance of self that "exists amid a perpetually changing variety of states of perfection, feeling and volition."<sup>197</sup> Wiggin's performance of her persona as educator acknowledged the shifts in expression of her role as educator from young enthusiast of Froebel's philosophies, to the self-assured educational philanthropist. Intriguingly, Wiggin often engaged both of these frames simultaneously. In the following examples, Wiggin's ability to negotiate the performance of her persona within the context of women's public presence in the nineteenth century and through her use of Froebel's philosophy as justification, points to her ability to create a coherent representation of herself in this mode.

Wiggin engaged in impression management not only through her association with women in the field of education in America, but also through her associations with the men. In 1877, Felix Adler, a prominent religious and cultural historian and a prolific writer on religion, philosophy, and moral education, had formed the Ethical Culture Society under the auspices of advancing social justice through moral and

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<sup>196</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 163.

<sup>197</sup> W. T. Harris, "Editor's Preface" *Friedrich Froebel's Pedagogics of the Kindergarten, or, his ideas concerning the play and playthings of the child* trans. Josephine Jarvis (London: Edward Arnold, 1897), v-vi.

ethical education.<sup>198</sup> As Adler's mission shared a number of ideals with that of the Kindergarten Movement, he naturally became involved in the establishment of kindergartens, particularly in low-income areas. It was through this shared desire to affect change in the slums of America that Wiggin and Adler first met. In 1878, Adler traveled to California and gave a series of lectures as fundraisers designed to capitalize on the growing interest in the kindergarten movement since Marwedel's work had begun there. The lecture series was a financial success, and Wiggin, who had completed her schooling under Marwedel and had opened "Swallow's Nest" at her home in Santa Barbara, was chosen by Adler to be the teacher at the first free kindergarten in California. While Wiggin demurely stated in her autobiography that her nomination was simply because "there was but few trained kindergartners from whom to choose and I was called from Santa Barbara to organize the work," she was also a clear choice to represent the movement as it continued to grow.<sup>199</sup>

Another key male figure in the movement who influenced Wiggin's early impression management in this arena was John Swett. Swett was a prominent member of California's educational system and had been the State Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1862-1867. His support of the free kindergarten movement helped integrate kindergartens into the public school system in California. However, Nora A. Smith's characterization of a meeting between Swett and Wiggin affords the best example of Wiggin's active positioning of her identity within the context of the kindergarten movement. In her biography of Wiggin, Smith noted in detail an event at

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<sup>198</sup> For more information on Adler and the Ethical Culture Society, see Horace L. Friess's *Felix Adler and Ethical Culture: Memories and Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). The Ethical Culture Society remains operational in New York; more information can be found on its website at <http://www.nysec.org/>.

<sup>199</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 107.



which Wiggin performed as both the ardent admirer and the philanthropic patron of kindergarten education:

On one occasion a public meeting was held to discuss the value of the free kindergarten to the community, and it was advertised that Miss Kate Douglas Smith would take the affirmative side of the question, Professor John Swett, Principal of San Francisco's High School, assuming the negative. The evening came, and my sister made her address, so convincing in its arguments, so glowing with enthusiasm, so magnetic in its outpouring, that the room, though crowded with tired teachers and staid taxpayers, shook with waves of applause. When these had died away, Professor Swett was called upon in rebuttal, but he only shook his grey head, held tight to the arms of his chair, and answered with his familiar little chuckle, "No; I'm well enough off where I am. I've got a wife and family and I've no right to expose myself to certain destruction!"<sup>200</sup>

While this public debate was most likely engineered as a propaganda-style fundraiser for the kindergarten movement, this description reinforces both aspects of how Wiggin framed her educator persona. Smith does not include any of Wiggin's arguments in her description of the event—arguments that Smith would have been well versed in, as a trained kindergartener herself. Rather, Smith focuses on Wiggin's *performance* by choosing to note how persuasive she was in her the arguments, and how Wiggin's charismatic argument supporting the Kindergarten Movement that Swett was unable to offer an opposing argument. The descriptors Smith employed serve to emphasize Wiggin's performance of persona over the actual content of the debate. Indeed, by quoting Swett's invocation of his wife and family, Smith reinforces Wiggin's connection to the women's sphere of influence. Smith also included the working- and middle-class audience's positive response that reinforced her own perception of Wiggin's performance, claiming that the room "shook with

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<sup>200</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, 42-43.

waves of applause.”<sup>201</sup> Smith argues that Wiggin’s performance as the vibrant young voice of the movement elicited an enthusiasm that equaled that of the speaker.

While the words Smith used indicate the more naïve presentation of self Wiggin employed, the structure of the event itself frames that very performance within a much more professional philanthropic context. The fact that it was a “public meeting... to discuss the value of the free kindergarten to the community” places the event within the context of the community—and the rising women’s club movement that embraced many progressive social and educational reforms.<sup>202</sup> In addition to being a public forum, the event is more specifically characterized as a debate, with Wiggin taking “the affirmative side of the question” and Swett at a loss for a “rebuttal.” This framing established Wiggin’s authority as someone not only knowledgeable in the discussion’s subject, but educated in the rhetoric of public speaking and debate that had only recently become integrated into the education of women.

In Swett’s recollection of the early days of the movement to integrate kindergartens into the public school system, he noted that “soon after this school was opened I visited it, and, on request of the principal, detailed two student teachers, partly as assistants and partly as students of the kindergarten methods.”<sup>203</sup> While Swett’s appreciation of the work undertaken by Wiggin at the Silver Street Kindergarten made an immediate impact on the training of those teaching in the

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. For an excellent discussion of the women’s club movement, please see Karen J. Blair’s *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), as well as Robyn Muncy’s *Creating Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>203</sup> John Swett, *Public Education in California: Its Origin and Development, with Personal Reminiscences of Half a Century*, (New York: American Book Company, 1911), 224-225.

public school system, the most important impact of the Silver Street Kindergarten was impressed upon the Tar Flats neighborhood which supported it.

Wiggin faced an enormous challenge when she first strove to establish the Silver Street Kindergarten. The Free Kindergarten Movement was largely supported and run by the middle class as a social reform intended for the working class, with little input at the outset from those whose children would actually form the classes. Establishing a kindergarten in Tar Flats, at the time one of the worst slums in San Francisco, would require Wiggin's energy and ingenuity. As she recalled the history of the project in *My Garden of Memory*, she created a frame within which she could continue to construct her identity performance as the ardent educator. Convinced that "no teacher, be she ever so gifted, ever so consecrated, can sufficiently influence the children under her care for these few hours a day, unless she can gradually persuade the parents to be her allies," Wiggin developed a plan to entice parents to send their children to the kindergarten so that she would not have to solicit applications.<sup>204</sup> Wiggin saw the necessity for the school to "have its roots deep I the neighborhood life," and developed a strategy to encourage those roots by visiting all the storefronts in the surrounding neighborhood, purchasing supplies for outfitting the kindergarten classroom, and performing a persona that was recognizable and comfortable to the families in the Tar Flats community.<sup>205</sup>

Wiggin described her forays into the community at length:

Buying and borrowing were my first two aids to fellowship. I bought my luncheon at a different bakery every day and my glass of milk at a different dairy. At each visit I talked, always casually, of the new kindergarten, and gave its date of opening, but never solicited pupils. I bought pencils, crayons,

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<sup>204</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 111.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

and mucilage of the local stationers; brown paper and soap of the grocers; hammers and tacks of the hardware man. I borrowed many things, returned them soon, and thus gave my neighbors the satisfaction of being helpful.<sup>206</sup>

By patronizing the shops in the neighborhood, Wiggin not only established a financial relationship between the community and the school, but also positioned herself as a philanthropist interested in actively engaging in the daily interaction of Tar Flats. In addition to this referencing of the conservative aspects of her role as educator that more readily aligned her with the rhetoric of the clubwoman, Wiggin engaged her public by playing the passionate teacher.

At each of the shops, she energetically shared her excitement for the school and its work, showing the clerks and craftsmen “the particular branch of kindergarten handiwork that might appeal to him, whether laying of patterns in sticks and tablets, weaving, drawing, rudimentary efforts at designing, folding and cutting of paper, or clay modeling.”<sup>207</sup> She employed her enthusiasm with a specific intention in these instances, which allowed her to recommend the free kindergarten to the shopkeepers and clerks who surely had or knew children who could benefit from her work, without having “the unpleasant duty of visiting people’s houses uninvited, nor the embarrassment of being treated as peddlers of patronage and good advice are apt to be treated.”<sup>208</sup> Wiggin thought it prudent to position herself closer to community membership that “peddler of patronage” in order to garner the support—and the students—for the Silver Street Kindergarten. Her decision to foreground one facet of her performance of self, and by doing so “keep the situation simple and free from embarrassment for any one [sic]; to be as completely a part of it as if I had been born

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

there; to be helpful without being intrusive” clearly shows her understanding of and ability to engage in impression management.<sup>209</sup>

Wiggin again put more weight on the naivety she embraced as part of her identity within the kindergarten movement when she addressed how her involvement in kindergarten education brought her into association with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and the Concord School of Philosophy. Following the first year of the Silver Street Kindergarten, Wiggin determined to spend her summer traveling back East “for study, observation, and examination” to improve her own teaching, and to prepare for the opening of her own kindergarten teacher training school.<sup>210</sup> While Wiggin scheduled stops in several key cities where the kindergarten movement had taken root, including St. Louis, (where Susan Blow had met with measurable success), Wiggin focused the entirety of her recollection of that summer on her invitation from Elizabeth Peabody to visit Concord, Massachusetts. Peabody also invited Wiggin to participate in the first convocation of what was to become known as the Concord School of Philosophy.

Wiggin included Peabody’s letter of invitation in her autobiography. In it, Peabody fashioned a fascinating characterization of the young Wiggin, calling her “a hero-worshipper, and we have heroes of all sizes here just now at our great School of Philosophy.”<sup>211</sup> Perhaps because of the nature of their prior relationship, Peabody framed Wiggin once again as an ardent student, advising Wiggin:

You shall slip into a little front seat by my side in the lecture room, you shall drink tea with dear Mr. and Mrs. Emerson, lunch at the Old Manse, and walk with good Bronson Alcott through all the beautiful haunts sacred to the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

memory of Thoreau. You shall sit at the feet of the Minute-Man with his famous young sculptor, Daniel Chester French, and he will doubtless make your heart beat with patriotism as he conducts you over the historic battle-fields. I am sure that in my life, as our favorite Mr. Emerson says, “the one event which never loses its romance is the encounter with superior persons on terms allowing the happiest intercourse.” We are all old fogies in the house, and we want a fresh, young mind to help us with its happy intuitions. Come!<sup>212</sup>

Wiggin herself embraced the frame Peabody provided, with its romantic picture of what being a student entailed, as well as the position as the “fresh, young mind” of the group. Wiggin captured the energy and inspiration of youth within her framing of this episode as part of her role as educator, when, after having used Peabody’s letter to establish her connection to and position within the Concord School, she noted that “every night that I spent in Concord was enriched by the conversation of that noble and venerable woman Elizabeth Peabody, the revered and eminent champion of childhood, who had been instrumental in inspiring a greater number of mothers and educators than any woman of her day.”<sup>213</sup> At the same time she reinforced her role as inspired novice in comparison to Peabody, Wiggin also established that part of her frame that depended on a more conservative, educated persona, simply via association Emerson, Alcott, Peabody and the rest of the participants in The Concord School.

Wiggin felt that she “returned to California better fitted for my task,” and soon afterward established The California Kindergarten Training.<sup>214</sup> Even after Wiggin and her husband moved to New York in 1884, and her sister had taken over as the chief instructor, Wiggin continued to give lectures at the training school. The lectures,

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 159.

which would eventually be published as *Lectures on the Gifts of Froebel*, show that, as Wiggin became better known as one of the founders of the kindergarten movement (despite being so much younger than the other women similarly categorized), her framing of her educational work within her presentation of self shifts away from the naïve and toward a sense of expertise.

The Kate Douglas Wiggin Collection at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, houses Wiggin's handwritten lecture notes and the manuscript copies of *Lectures on the Gifts of Froebel*.<sup>215</sup> The marginal notes and edits contained in these copies indicate that these may have been read from on more than one occasion, and have marginal headings that may have aided Wiggin in highlighting or emphasizing specific passages. In addition, Wiggin made notes as to which portions of the lectures were more suitable for the advanced class, as well as how best to transition from one lecture to the next. All of this 'behind the scenes' work helped Wiggin position herself as the wise counselor and expert in the arena of Froebelian teaching techniques.

Wiggin reinforced that position by calling upon her connections to the other great women in her field. Once again, Peabody is a central figure in Wiggin's identity performance, when she uses Peabody's words as a source of inspiration for her students. Wiggin began one of her lectures with Peabody's charge that "to be a good Kindergartener is the perfect development of womanliness—a working with God at the very fountain of artistic and intellectual power and moral character. It is, therefore, the highest finish that can be given to a woman's education, to be trained

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<sup>215</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin Collection, Special Collections & Archives. Bowdoin College Library.

for a Kindergartener.”<sup>216</sup> Here, Wiggin was only strengthening the structure of her own self-representation by connecting to Peabody, and affirming the power that notions of womanliness and morality still exerted on women in the field of kindergarten.

**“When her honors fell thick upon her she still remembered the needs of the children”: The Transition from the Classroom to Public Speaking<sup>217</sup>**

To Wiggin, education—particular early education—was vital in the creation of a future generation of independent female thinkers. She deplored both the limited education offered to lower middle class girls and the inadequate training of the instructors pressed into teaching them. Yet Wiggin never embraced the more radical aspects of the Progressive movement and nineteenth-century feminism such as dress reform, votes for women, and advocacy for better conditions for female factory workers. Indeed, she spoke publicly against suffrage as a distraction from the more necessary and pressing need for better education of lower class women and children. Such radical acts were outside the boundaries of the public persona that she had framed.

Wiggin embraced her professional role, first as a kindergartener and instructor of kindergarteners, then as fledgling author. While she had published serially “Half-a-Dozen Housekeepers” in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in her late teens, it was not until she was searching for additional funding for her Silver Street Kindergarten that she began to develop her literary performance. The kindergarten remained a vital part of her

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<sup>216</sup> Manuscript copy of *Lectures on the Gifts of Froebel*, Vol. 3, Kate Douglas Wiggin Collection, Special Collections & Archives. Bowdoin College Library.

<sup>217</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, 46.



literary career, well after she had left her daily involvement with the classroom.

Wiggin's "A Girl and the Kingdom: Learning to Teach," published in pamphlet form by the Los Angeles City Teachers Club and serially in *The Companion*, provided the basis for a large portion of her autobiography's presentation of self as educator.<sup>218</sup>

These reiterations of the same material helped her manage her desired impression as someone who was "admirably fitted for her work both as kindergartener and training teacher—vivacious, magnetic, musical, dramatic, expressive, and, because of these new gifts, a natural story-teller."<sup>219</sup>

As Wiggin's publishing success rose, she was offered new opportunities in the realm of public speaking that would combined her love of children and her love of performance in a public setting. Wiggin was often asked to speak in support of the free kindergarten movement as she worked to help establish free kindergartens along the West Coast. In 1882, she gave a series of kindergarten lectures in Portland, Oregon at the request of Mrs. Caroline Dunlop, a graduate of her Silver Street Training School, who had established the first kindergarten in Portland the year before. These lectures were the precursor to what we become an integral part of both Wiggin's income, and her public identity. Wiggin understood the benefit of the public performance of her written work in an age when the Lyceum lecture circuit was profitable for both the managers and orators. The performance of public speaking appealed to Wiggin in that she could develop her work for and with an audience without handing over control of the work itself. She was able to evaluate her writing and her performance based on her audience's reaction. As an orator, she could shape

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<sup>218</sup> Wiggin, "A Girl and the Kingdom: Learning to Teach" Los Angeles City Teachers Club, 1915; *The Companion—For all the Family* (12 November 1914): 619-620.

<sup>219</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, 41.

the performance of her identity through her work, as much as she shaped the work itself.

### Chapter 3: “Overwhelmed with Embarrassment and Responsibility”<sup>220</sup>: Kate Douglas Wiggin’s “Private” Public Speaking

As the Kindergarten Movement gained a foothold in California, and as her sister reached an age and expertise which made her fit to supervise an increasing share of the daily operations of both the Silver Street Kindergarten and the California Kindergarten Training School, Kate Douglas Wiggin’s own role in these endeavors shifted more toward advocacy and fundraising. With the success of her early serial novels, and with her growing national recognition as a tireless supporter of Froebel’s kindergarten teaching techniques, Wiggin was often called upon to speak at both private and public functions soliciting support for the schools. From her return to the East Coast in the 1880s until her death, Wiggin used her fame and community connections in highly creative ways to support and advance those causes closest to her heart, creating a performance of self that embraced the role of elocutionist without disrupting her position as a middle class woman. Wiggin staged speaking engagements throughout the country that allowed her to pursue an agenda of benevolence that focused initially on education but later encompassed more diverse issues.

In this chapter, I argue that when Wiggin created another performance of persona that transitioned her public identity from Froebelian disciple to platform

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<sup>220</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 218.

speaker. Wiggin's framing of herself was complicated by the tension surrounding women's public voice in the period, as rhetorical training became more integrated into women's education in nineteenth-century America, yet constrained by the feminine ideals that "urged women toward passivity, humility, and self-sacrifice."<sup>221</sup> Wiggin negotiated the tension between these feminine ideals and the public speaking platform by creating a performance as public speaker that encompassed three distinct yet overlapping iterations: one focused on elocution, one on speech making, and the last on philanthropic readings. All of these facets of her performance as public speaker acknowledged and even embraced the strictures of middle-class femininity, while simultaneously allowing her to employ rhetorical strategies that created the aura of the private sphere within the public space.

Wiggin sought to use the expansion of the public sphere to include public modes of women's speech by creating likenesses of the domestic sphere in performance. Shaped by an implied imperative for women's rhetorical silence in nineteenth-century culture, Wiggin discovered a way to engage publicly in educational rhetoric without compromising her image as a proper and virtuous woman. She chose rhetorical spaces that allowed her to expand the circumference of her private sphere in a manner that allowed her voice to be a part of the conversation on such public issues as early childhood education and women's roles in community enhancement, without allowing slippages in her identification middle-class and feminine. In addition, she capitalized on the boundary between private and public when it best suited her needs, shaping her public performances as "private"

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<sup>221</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xiii.

conversations between her and her audience. Wiggin indicated a discomfort with becoming a professional platform speaker by refusing to hire someone to manage her appearances for her. She noted in her autobiography that she turned down James Burton Pond, cofounder of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, when he offered to manage her appearances, preferring to choose her engagements personally.<sup>222</sup> While Wiggin claimed that her discomfort over entering into a contractual agreement with Pond was in part due to her misgivings over “the idea of being a ‘box-office attraction,’” remaining independent allowed Wiggin to make decisions about performing in public based not only on the charities supported by her appearances, but also on the environment in which she was asked to speak.<sup>223</sup> Here, Wiggin managed the impression of her performance as elocutionist while simultaneously managing her position on the platform stage.

### **“Most Congenial to Their Tastes”: Creating a Role for Women on the Public Platform<sup>224</sup>**

In “‘Intelligent Members or Restless Disturbers’: Women’s Rhetorical Styles, 1880-1920,” the late Rhetoric scholar Joanne Wagner discussed the “tension between personal style in language and accommodating society’s stylistic expectations” that confronted women at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>225</sup> Wagner notes the two major strands of rhetoric that surge to the forefront at the end of the nineteenth

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<sup>222</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 223.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Lydia Sigourney, “Letters to Young Ladies,” in *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900*, ed. Jane Donawerth (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 147.

<sup>225</sup> Joanne Wagner, “‘Intelligent Members or Restless Disturbers’: Women’s Rhetorical Styles, 1880-1920,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 185.

century and which highlight the struggle women faced to create a space for public performance within the circumscribed role assigned to women. These strands are practical rhetoric, which standardized “accepted manners of expression” and focused on correct grammar, and belletristic rhetoric, which privileged the “persona of the speaker.”<sup>226</sup> Wiggin combined these rhetorical styles by building upon what Nan Johnson, a noted scholar who specializes in postbellum women’s rhetoric, refers to as the “parlor traditions of rhetoric and popular constructions of rhetorical performance” that worked “to sustain the icon of the white, middle-class woman as queen of her domestic sphere by promoting a code of rhetorical behavior for women that required the performance of conventional femininity.”<sup>227</sup> Wiggin acknowledged the construct of conventional femininity, and as will be seen in the examples throughout this chapter, employed it to her advantage in her performances.

Soon after the publication of *The Bird’s Christmas Carol* in 1887, Wiggin found the opportunity to expand her repertoire of performance. This new role was not as a performer in the mode she explored through her youthful associations with Annie Louise Cary and Dion Boucicault. Rather, this role was formed to meet the demand for her to read from her increasingly popular literary work. Wiggin quickly realized these readings could enhance not only her own income, but also the income of the Silver Street Kindergarten and her newly established training school for kindergarten teachers. Initially, she was not comfortable with this public role and her unease at mounting the platform and addressing the public likely rose from the idealization of the silent, pliant woman espoused late nineteenth-century culture.

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 186-187.

<sup>227</sup> Nan Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 2.

This image of the pliant submissive woman marked the resurfacing of a conservative depiction of femininity that constantly barraged women of the postbellum era with ideas and images that sought to re-create the boundaries between the private and the public sphere. It emerged as a reaction to the number of women acquiring rhetorical power from the anti-slavery, temperance, and suffrage movements. Women like the Grimké sisters, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Susan B. Anthony sought public venues in which their voices would be heard on these issues. Yet, as Johnson eloquently argues in “Reigning in the Court of Silence: Women and Rhetorical Space in Postbellum America:”

The argument that the rhetorical conduct of the “wise and thoughtful” woman could be contrasted instructively with the trivial and ultimately inconsequential rhetorical behavior of loud and talkative women is one that was made in so many cultural conversations of the postbellum period that it achieved the power of an ideological trope.<sup>228</sup>

Women of the postbellum era who sought to have a voice in the public sphere perpetually faced the threat of being perceived as “loud and talkative” and thereby having their rhetorical performances rendered ineffectual.

The tension between these two performances of nineteenth-century American femininity can be seen throughout the conduct literature of the era. For example, when Hannah More published *Coeleb’s in Search of a Wife* in 1830, she expressed the overriding sentiment about women speaking in public and the appropriate role of women when the narrator says of her hostess “...she completely escaped the disgrace of being thought a scholar, but not the suspicion of having very good taste.”<sup>229</sup> Here,

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<sup>228</sup> Nan Johnson, “Reigning in the Court of Silence: Women and Rhetorical Space in Postbellum America,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33.3 (2000): 221.

<sup>229</sup> Hannah More, *Coeleb’s in Search of a Wife* in *The Works of Hannah More*. (London: for T. Cadell, 1830) 28.

the hostess does not have the power to employ her own voice because it was not appropriate behavior for the hostess in her role at the time. Instead, the hostess must adroitly display her taste and breeding without exhibiting that it is a learned behavior. In her influential advice manuals of the antebellum period, Lydia Sigourney reinforced this idea that, while a lady may have education, she should certainly not reveal it in mixed company. In *Letters to Young Ladies* (1833), Sigourney advises that “another mode of imparting pleasure in conversation is to lead others to such subjects as are most congenial to their taste, or on which they possess the most extensive information. From this will rise a double benefit. They will be satisfied, and you will reap the fruits of their knowledge.”<sup>230</sup> This idea qualifies More’s sentiments somewhat, in that the young woman is allowed to speak, so long as it is not her own words. The woman’s role in this kind of conversation is to provide context and comfort for those who have something to say—which, by implication, are the men in the group.

Sigourney most likely never intended for her young ladies to join men on the platform in support of social issues.<sup>231</sup> Yet while Sigourney reinforced the private role of women in public speaking, she also offered her young ladies an opening—a loophole that would later be exploited by women seeking a public voice as sentiment began to shift. Shortly after admonishing her readers to quietly “reap the fruits” of others’ knowledge, she qualified her statement, while seemingly reinforcing it: “those who would please others should never talk for display. The vanity of shining in conversation is usually subversive of its own desires. However your qualifications

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<sup>230</sup> Sigourney, 147.

<sup>231</sup> Sigourney was herself an abolitionist and supporter of education reform and education for minorities. However, she supported these causes primarily through writing, and not public speaking.



may transcend those of the persons who surround you, it is both unwise and unkind to obtrude them upon their notice or betray disregard of their opinion.”<sup>232</sup> Sigourney used the word “subversive” in to imply that her reader could take this warning at face value, and keep silent regardless of her transcendent qualifications; or, as was increasingly the case as the nineteenth century progressed, the young woman reading Sigourney’s advice could accept the subversive challenge in *Letters to Young Ladies* to find her own (public) voice in a way that those she hoped to please would hear not her opinions voiced, but simply their own echoed back to them.

Sigourney was cognizant of the shift in culture in America at mid-century. Along with the rise in print publication and readership during the nineteenth century came a proliferation of etiquette manuals espousing appropriate moral and social behavior for the burgeoning middle class. As scholar John F. Kasson noted, “fundamental to the popularity of manuals of etiquette was the conviction that proper manners and social respectability could be purchased and learned.”<sup>233</sup> In her *Letters to My Pupils with Narrative and Biographical Sketches*, published in 1851, Sigourney began to address this shift from innate to acquired propriety and respectability: “the charms of beauty, and the distinctions of wealth, are not at the disposal of the multitude. But good manners are open to the attainment of all who have the good feeling to cultivate them.”<sup>234</sup> Yet it was not until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century that women were writing specifically about women’s public speaking and the techniques which they employed.

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<sup>232</sup> Sigourney, 147.

<sup>233</sup> John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang): 37, 43.

<sup>234</sup> Lydia Sigourney, *Letters to My Pupils with Narrative and Biographical Sketches*. (New York: Robert and Carter and Brothers, 1851), 35.

By 1904, Mary Augusta Jordan, an educational reformer and writer of etiquette books, had integrated women's public speaking into her conduct manual titled *Correct Writing and Speaking*.<sup>235</sup> The title of the text itself implies that women had moved beyond the "art of conversation" and were speaking in the public sphere to a larger extent than before.<sup>236</sup> Jordan's text seems to imply that, since women were speaking in public already, it would be best to ensure that they have some proper training. She argued that:

Gradually the feeling has grown in the community that women ought to be able to do what public speaking naturally comes in their way. The attitude of conservatism in regard to the pleasure that they should display in the exercise of their powers is not retained when their success of skill is under discussion. A woman may be forgiven for saying nothing, or even for publishing her incapacity for public address, but nothing justifies or quite excuses her saying her say badly.<sup>237</sup>

However, while Jordan advocated a greater role in public speaking for women, that role is still couched in vague terms, and focuses on what may be "naturally" pleasurable for women to communicate in a public forum, not on the potential for women to assert opinions or effect change. While space in the public sphere continued to be made more accessible to women like Wiggin, defining a role within that sphere and within the confines of feminine respectability continued to be debated.

### **"Wit and wisdom are both expected at banquets": Wiggin's Role as Elocutionist and Creating Space for Intimate Public Speaking<sup>238</sup>**

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<sup>235</sup> Mary Augusta Jordan, *Correct Writing and Speaking* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1904)

<sup>236</sup> Nan Johnson, "Reigning in the Court of Silence", 225.

<sup>237</sup> Mary Augusta Jordan, 67.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Throughout her autobiography, Wiggin downplayed her public role as elocutionist, despite the fact that two chapters of the work are devoted to her “New Career” in “Semi-Professional Readings” and references to her oration are laced throughout the entire text.<sup>239</sup> Wiggin may have consciously affected this position in order to participate in the shift in rhetorical style examined previously; regardless, Wiggin’s discomfort within this role seems disingenuous, given the frequency with which she spoke publicly, initially as instructor and keynote speaker at the California Kindergarten Training School and the California Froebel Society, and later as an increasingly popular novelist-cum-elocutionist.<sup>240</sup> Yet, when she wrote that she saw her public speaking endeavors as “an entirely new path” that was “gradually opening at this time, and persistently attracting me ever so little from the main road of a literary career, although I was quite unconscious of it,” she clearly was not associating her early advocacy of kindergarten education with her performance as elocutionist, despite examples such as the educational “debate” with John Swett described in the previous chapter.<sup>241</sup>

Indeed, much of Wiggin’s earliest elocutionary work supporting education reform goes unmentioned in her autobiography. However, in *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her*, Nora Archibald Smith referred to a letter she received from Wiggin at the end of her first year teaching at the Silver Street Kindergarten, in which Wiggin wrote that she had been “invited by the City Superintendent of Schools to lecture before his teachers and that the Executive Committee of the State Teachers’

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<sup>239</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 216-233.

<sup>240</sup> While these lectures and speeches are alluded to in *My Garden of Memory*, numerous programs for these public speaking engagements are archived in The Quillcote Collection, The Maine Women Writers Collection, and the Kate Douglas Wiggin Collection at Bowdoin College.

<sup>241</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 216.

Association has also asked for an address.”<sup>242</sup> These lectures, and the many public speaking performances relating to the Silver Street Kindergarten that followed, first occurred in 1878—almost twelve years before Wiggin herself marked the beginning of her oratory performances in her autobiography.

However, the bulk of the oratory Wiggin performed in the 1880s and 1890s took the form of elocutionary presentations of her growing oeuvre of fiction and participated in the popular Delsarte system of elocution which, as Johnson indicates in “The Popularization of Nineteenth Century Rhetoric: Elocution and the Private Learner,” emphasized the “physical culture” of public speaking, “involving dramatic interpretation, pantomime, and tableaux.”<sup>243</sup> Wiggin’s writing and reading style naturally with this system of performance, which several writers of popular books advocating the system to request permission to include Wiggin’s work in their texts, including Anna Morgan, the author of the widely-read *An Hour with Delsarte: A Study in Expression*, and *The Art of Speech and Deportment*.<sup>244</sup>

Regardless of whether or not her actual initiation into the realm of public speaking can be pinpointed, Wiggin’s recollection of her oratorical performances underscored the tension she found in negotiating her position between the private and public spheres. Recalling a particular speaking engagement at the Women’s Unitarian League in New York in 1892, Wiggin wrote that, when the president of the New York Kindergarten Association introduced her as “a sort of Joan of Arc for the

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<sup>242</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925): 33.

<sup>243</sup> Nan Johnson, “The Popularization of Nineteenth Century Rhetoric: Elocution and the Private Learner,” in *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric*, eds. Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 144.

<sup>244</sup> Anna Morgan, *An Hour with Delsarte: A Study in Expression* (New York: Edgar S. Werner Publisher, 1891) and *The Art of Speech and Deportment* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1909).

cause,” she felt “overwhelmed with embarrassment and responsibility” at the thought of the power her presence and speech commanded.<sup>245</sup>

Wiggin was quite aware of the shifts occurring in the cultural context in which she operated, and both her speaking texts and her recollection of the engagements as published in her autobiography reflect her attempt to position herself somewhere between the private and public spheres, using the “art of conversation” as Nan Johnson postulates of all middle class women, to make “public utterances.”<sup>246</sup> This positioning allowed her to speak out, yet still maintain the persona of a “wise and thoughtful” woman “whispering a comforting message” into the ears of her audience of confidantes, in order to “reap the fruits of their knowledge.”<sup>247</sup> Wiggin created a sense of intimacy in her public speaking that hinged on similarities between herself and her audience no matter the venue. Yet venue, particularly in a time when the public and private spheres were constantly being reinforced and redefined, was extremely important. Jordan addressed this issue:

Public utterance is full as important as it ever was and perhaps more definitely an instrument of good, inasmuch as its methods are better understood and its effects judged of as being within the sphere of ordinary cause and effect. After-dinner speaking has for some years gone beyond the telling of old stories or the repetition of platitudes. Wit and wisdom are both expected at banquets, and the postprandial effort that is all froth is quite sharply resented by the eaters of well-planned, well-served, and well-paid-for dinners. Closer analysis reveals the underlying conviction that the community spirit, at its simplest, is real and significant enough to require some serious expression.<sup>248</sup>

In some ways, Wiggin attempted to construct an alternative, intrastitial sphere that shared aspects of both the private and the public so that she could successfully

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<sup>245</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 218.

<sup>246</sup> Nan Johnson, “Reigning in the Court of Silence,” 225; Jordan, 65.

<sup>247</sup> Here, I have borrowed phrases from Nan Johnson’s quotation of Mrs. Samuel Lindsay –*What is Worth While*, published in 1895, and Lydia Sigourney as quoted above.

<sup>248</sup> Jordan, 65-66.

transgress the boundary between them without consequence. Wiggin's negotiation of this boundary was inherently performative, but qualified by the intimacy of the audience and the "community spirit" it engendered.<sup>249</sup> Wiggin built a space in which she associated herself with the audience, as one of their kind, not as someone speaking to them from a podium or a pulpit, but as someone they could chat with over tea.

This intuitive understanding of the importance of a speaker's relationship with an audience, figuratively and spatially, underpinned many of Wiggin's oratorical performances. Her love for performing and her sense of the theatrical often informed her writing—and her public readings of her work. While she never acted professionally, she "stage managed" her public speaking engagements, and arranged set pieces and backdrops to suit the occasion. Descriptions of the attention to environmental detail in her public addresses highlight Wiggin's awareness of the importance of the space in which she performed. In a letter to her mother and sister written in the early 1890s, Wiggin wrote:

The surroundings, however, put me all out of key with myself. The low platform was in a large chapel with Sunday School rooms opening out from it; these also crowded with people who could not see me and were constantly moving and buzzing. The platform was covered with a threadbare grass-green carpet and nothing on it but a marble-topped table and a hideous pulpit-chair too heavy to move. There was a large china water-pitcher and tumbler which I courteously banished. (If people cannot read without stopping every now and then to drink, they should stay at home!) A villainous, yes, a violent, terra-cotta background completed the awful picture!...I hope the person who dressed the stage suffered half as much as I, at the tableau confronting the audience.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> From an undated letter written from Hotel Albert, New York City, reprinted in Wiggin's *My Garden of Memory*, 230-234.

Wiggin grasped how environment could affect not only the delivery but also the reception of her public speaking. Feminist rhetoric scholar Roxanne Mountford's work on spatial rhetoric can be used to examine not only how Wiggin may have created an environment to inform her rhetoric, but how the "performance" space affected her delivery. In Mountford's essay "On Gender and Rhetorical Space," she states that "'Rhetorical Space' can be made a more useful concept for rhetoricians...if we apply it more narrowly to the effect of physical space on a communicative event."<sup>251</sup> Wiggin's time with Cary quite possibly made her aware not only of qualities of voice and diction, but also of the setting in which the actor/orator performs.

Wiggin's efforts to stage her public speaking as if they occurred in the more private space of the parlor did not go unnoticed by those that reviewed her performances. One review in the *Hartford Courant* noted that "the stage was made aesthetic with palms, potted plants and Japanese screens, a fitting setting for so charming a personality as that possessed by the gifted writer herself."<sup>252</sup> The foliage and screens mirrored an exoticism and orientalism that was popular in turn-of-the-century parlors and sitting rooms, and served to help define the stage as a more intimate environment, and allowed Wiggin to position her audience as if they were simply a rather large group of acquaintances that had come to call on her. A notice of her engagement at a Women's Christian Temperance Union function in Portland, Maine drew an even more direct connection between the platform and the parlor in

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<sup>251</sup> Roxanne Mountford, "On Gender and Rhetorical Space," *Rhetoric Society*, 30, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 41-42.

<sup>252</sup> Review of public speaking (Indian Association Entertainment at Unity Hall), [Hartford] *Courant*, 23 November 1893. Samuel Bradley Wiggin Papers. Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Collection.

Wiggin's staging: "The stage last evening was transformed into a drawing room to which flowers and plants added their attractions. Mrs. Wiggin, graceful and easy in her manner, moved about the platform, sometimes reading as she stood, or...while seated in a capacious arm chair beneath a parlor lamp."<sup>253</sup> Not only did this reviewer specifically note the presence of the parlor on the stage for this reading, but the review also captured the manner in which Wiggin moved through the environment, noting her "graceful and easy" manner that could have suited her as the hostess at tea as well as it served her reading her work. Wiggin her performance of herself as reader as if she were truly in her parlor, "naturally" moving through the space as if completely at ease in her surroundings.

By creating an atmosphere of the parlor on the platform stage, Wiggin contextualized her public oratorical performance within the private sphere, and this combined space allowed her an arena for a performance that created opportunities for her audience to relate to her on an extremely personal level. The ease and familiarity were reciprocated: nearly without exception, the reviews of her public speaking responded to her persona as well as her technique. A review of one of her public speaking engagements in Buffalo, New York succinctly acknowledged both her persona and her technique, stating that "in addition to her real creative power as a fictionist, Mrs. Wiggin has easy, graceful manners, a voice of much natural beauty under perfect cultivation and a finished method of elocution, by which the telling points in her work, be they in the line of the pathetic, the quaint or the dramatic, are

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<sup>253</sup> Review of public speaking (WCTU, Portland, Maine), unknown newspaper, unknown date [1893-1895]. Samuel Bradley Wiggin Papers. Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Collection.



unerringly made.”<sup>254</sup> Descriptions of Wiggin’s grace and beauty were often included in accounts of her reading, as were her “charming manner,” “willowy figure,” and her “exceedingly magnetic” personality.<sup>255</sup> However, notices also commented on her technique, with particular attention paid to her vocal production. One reviewer noted that her voice was “of much natural beauty under perfect cultivation and a finished method of elocution, by which the telling points in her work, be they in the line of the pathetic, the quaint or the dramatic, are unerringly made.”<sup>256</sup> Wiggin’s audiences, exposed as they were to the techniques of rhetoric and elocution in their own parlors, clearly recognized her skills as public speaker.

Yet the preparation and management of a career as a public speaker, even of a “semi-professional” nature, clearly took its toll on Wiggin; in response to one letter hoping to entice her to read for an event, she responded: “I scarcely know what to say. I read four or five times last winter and the doctor thinks the excitement was largely to blame for the seven month’s illness from which I am barely recovered.”<sup>257</sup> Her health in question, Wiggin was forced to spend less time traveling for speaking engagements.

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<sup>254</sup> Review of public speaking (Indian Association Entertainment at Unity Hall), [Hartford] *Courant*, 23 November 1893. Samuel Bradley Wiggin Papers. Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Collection.

<sup>255</sup> Review of public speaking, (Monday Afternoon Club) unknown newspaper, unknown date; Review of public speaking, Boston, *Saturday Evening Gazette* 22 January 1891; Review of public speaking, Portland, ME; n.d. [1893-1895]. Samuel Bradley Wiggin Papers. Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Collection.

<sup>256</sup> Review of public speaking (Indian Association Entertainment at Unity Hall), [Hartford] *Courant*, 23 November 1893. Samuel Bradley Wiggin Papers. Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Collection.

<sup>257</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, to Miss Rodman, 1 November 1892. Maine Women Writers Collection. Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine.

**“My Motives Therefore Might be Described as Pure, but not Lofty”: Moving the Performance from the Platform to Parlor<sup>258</sup>**

While Wiggin continued her philanthropic contributions to Kindergarten societies around the world, the final decades of her life were devoted to performing philanthropy of a different nature, and shifted her public speaking away from the Lyceum model and toward a more private form of speech-making. By 1895, several key events had occurred that established a level of comfort and financial stability in Wiggin's life that allowed her to explore new ways to contribute to the social and civic improvement programs she supported. Wiggin had met with a steady literary success using the serialization of her work to promote eventual book sales. She used some of the income from this work to reunite with her mother and sister for summers in their childhood home in Maine, securing the lease of the old farmhouse that they were to purchase and name Quillcote. Perhaps the most stabilizing influence in Wiggin's life, however, was her second marriage.

Wiggin's marriage to George C. Riggs, a successful international businessman whom she met on an Atlantic crossing in 1894, provided Wiggin with the opportunity to shift away from the pressures of serial publication and the strain that the accompanying deadlines placed on her health, and toward a period of hugely successful book publication, culminating in the immensely and immediately popular *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. In addition, this level of prosperity allowed Wiggin to invest time and energy in charitable endeavors that she supported. This timing coincided with several philanthropic movements of the late Progressive era which in

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<sup>258</sup> Smith, 101.

the context of this study become important: the Woman's Club Movement and municipal housekeeping or the “city beautiful” campaign.

The Woman’s Club Movement at the turn of the twentieth century grew out of a number of influences. The generalized role for women was broadly conceptualized with greater frequency as the nineteenth century progressed in order to expand women's public roles. Linda Kerber identifies the rhetorical construction of the “Republican Mother” as early as the 1790s, whose “life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue” as shown in how she educated her sons and corrected the moral lapses of her husband.<sup>259</sup> However, while republican motherhood “justified an extension of women's absorption and participation in the civic culture” by expanding her role as educator and moral compass to include her charges' actions outside the home, it confined her ability to affect change to the moral, educational, and physical well-being of society as an extension of her role as mother.<sup>260</sup>

Barbara Cutter offers an additional nuance to Kerber’s earlier work that charts a clear path from republican motherhood to the women's club movement in America. In *Domestic Devils, Battlefield Angels: The Radicalism of American Womanhood, 1830-1865*, Cutter uses the term “redemptive womanhood” to stand in for Kerber’s Republican Motherhood and other historians’ characterization of women's roles as part of the cult of domesticity or true womanhood. She argues that, “the key to the properness of a woman was not her submission to male authority or her presence in a domestic sphere, but her ability to use her special moral, religious, and nurturing

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<sup>259</sup> Linda Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2. Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (Summer, 1976): 202.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

nature to redeem others.”<sup>261</sup> Mary Corbin Sies’ “The Domestic Mission of the Privileged American Suburban Homemaker, 1877-1917: A Reassessment” outlines the central tenet of the cult of domesticity as proscribing women to the “domestic duties centered exclusively in the private realm of the home.”<sup>262</sup> Sies further points out that between 1817 and 1917, women extended their duties beyond the private realm to “a variety of social welfare and social reform activities” that were often funneled through the work of women’s clubs.<sup>263</sup>

While there is no clear beginning of the women’s club movement, Linda J. Rynbrandt argues that much of Progressive era social reform came out of women's clubs and that the clubs “provided a bridge for women between the private home and the public world.”<sup>264</sup> By 1890, the progression from republican motherhood and the home as women's domain to the nationwide trend toward women's organizations that had education, philanthropy, or reform as part of their mission was clearly evident with the formation of the nationwide umbrella organization called the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. By 1906, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs had over half a million members, “extending into almost every town and city in our

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<sup>261</sup> Barbara Cutter, *Domestic Devils, Battlefield Angels: The Radicalism of American Womanhood, 1830-1865* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>262</sup> Mary Corbin Sies’ “The Domestic Mission of the Privileged American Suburban Homemaker, 1877-1917: A Reassessment” in Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne's *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture 1840-1940* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 195.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>264</sup> Linda J. Rynbrandt, "The 'Ladies of the Club' and Caroline Bartlett Crane: Affiliation and Alienation in Progressive Social Reform" *Gender and Society*, 11, No. 2. (April, 1997), 203.

own land” and operated with twelve standing committees covering issues from art to education to civic and legislative issues.<sup>265</sup>

The concept of municipal housekeeping was one rhetorical strategy used by some women’s clubs as they began to form and gain momentum. Municipal housekeeping drew a direct correlation between a woman's responsibility to her home life and her responsibility to her community; while housekeeping was “the art of making the home clean, healthy, comfortable and attractive,” municipal housekeeping was “the science of making the city, clean, healthy, comfortable and attractive.”<sup>266</sup> It was the women’s responsibility to educate the community, expanding their role beyond the home and asserting their maternal influence in order to maintain a healthy and productive community environment:

Can women, who for all ages have been the homemakers and the housekeepers of the race, be grateful enough that this is changing from an individual into a community task just at the time when women are being liberated from the chains of tradition and custom to a fuller participation in the events of life?<sup>267</sup>

Wiggin’s sister and biographer provided a dynamic piece of evidence useful for exploring the issue of expanding and reconfiguring rhetorical space based on the setting—and the speaker’s rhetorical power within that setting. In *Kate Douglas Wiggin, As Her Sister Knew Her*, Smith collected many of her sister’s notes and journals and wove them throughout the biography. One such piece is actually a collage of what Wiggin called “‘spontaneous’ verses, triolets, [and] jingles, written in

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<sup>265</sup> Sarah S. Platt Decker, "The Meaning of the Woman's Club Movement" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 28, Woman's Work and Organizations. (September, 1906): 200.

<sup>266</sup> Mildred Chadsey, "Municipal Housekeeping," *The Journal of Home Economics* 7, no. 2 (February, 1915), 53.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

advance” and tucked in her clothing and around the playing space in order to aid her memory during a staged “auction” to raise money for the New York Free Kindergarten Association in 1894.<sup>268</sup> The unique auction format of this piece, and how Wiggin dealt with that format, speaks directly to the issue of the power of women’s public speech and the reaction against it that continued to persevere at the turn of the century.

Wiggin herself was uncomfortable in the role of auctioneer, and the perceived power it gave her over her audience. She downplayed her personal power in the position by calling attention to how an auction should work—and her own lack of expertise in the role of the auctioneer. One of the examples throughout Wiggin’s account of the event that shows how she positioned herself as decidedly feminine in this public (and traditionally male) role, the most striking occurs once the bidding started:

Oh, pardon me, I thought I understood you seventy. You did not bid at all? I am all confusion! ... Mr. Choate told me to look at my audience searchingly and find the men who showed in their eyes an unmistakable longing for this book, and then, when found, to fix my attention on them and play them against the other. This is more difficult than it appears....<sup>269</sup>

In this passage, Wiggin not only performed a version of her public self as “confused” by her misperception of a gentleman’s willingness to bid, but also highlighted her male “mentor” in this endeavor, Joseph Choate, who was known at the time as an expert impromptu speaker. This conceit effectively placed her under the care of a male figure. The coquettish language she used to describe the “longing” looks of the gentleman in the audience framed both the situation and Wiggin outside the

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<sup>268</sup> Smith, 101-102.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 107.

professional orientation of an actual auction and auctioneer, and the tactics used by the auctioneer (or the coquette) to “win” the bid of the gentleman in question are also drenched in sentimentalism and seduction that are much more in keeping with the standardized feminine mores of the era.

The physical environment in which this auction-lecture occurred also merits close analysis.<sup>270</sup> Wiggin referred to it as a ballroom, but left it unclear whether this ballroom was public or private. Wiggin usually chose engagements that supported public charities but occurred in private homes, which was yet another way she joined public and private space. Indeed, the notion of speaking as a form of parlor entertainment made the transition into the public sphere an easier one for women. Women who spoke before a large group in a private home could still be read conservatively as putting into practice some of the art of conversation espoused by earlier nineteenth-century conduct manuals by women like More and Sigourney. Regardless of the level of privacy intimated, a ballroom environment implies both a relatively large, shared space, and one geared toward movement of some kind. Such a space provided an environment in which rhetorical performance functioned simultaneously as a public and a private act acknowledging what many nineteenth-century proponents of women’s rhetoric voiced in conduct manuals: the realization that rhetorical power “operates in private, domestic speech, as well as in public speaking.”<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> While a study of the semiotics of the ballroom as a performance space is beyond the scope of this work, useful texts for further exploration in this arena include Jean Alter’s *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*, Elaine Aston’s *Theatre as a Sign System: a Semiotics of Text and Performance*, and Marvin Carlson’s *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*.

<sup>271</sup> Jane Donawerth, “Nineteenth-Century United States Conduct Book Rhetoric by Women,” *Rhetoric Review* 21, no. 1 (2002): 11.

The text of Wiggin's address reinforces the assumption that Wiggin's movement through the space was more than metaphorical. This can be seen in the ways she addressed the audience and how she managed her public persona. She first unified the group by presenting herself as a subject apart from them (in the role of the auctioneer); then she specified groups of people, stratifying the crowd. She separated the gathering by gender, pointing out that: "the cautious man of business may say, 'How am I to know that the public taste will not grow away from this author?'" and thus highlighting the men's business acumen.<sup>272</sup> At the same time, Wiggin encouraged the women to "bid more freely than usual" since "this is no ordinary bargainshop," framing them as thrifty and discerning consumers.<sup>273</sup> This stratification reasserted the gender roles (and spheres) which Wiggin muddled and, combined with the flirtatious style of her speech as the auctioneer, took the focus away from her being "miscast" in her role and placed it squarely on the audience. By the time the book in question was successfully auctioned off, Wiggin had shifted the focus from herself to the audience, and her entertaining diversion as auctioneer combined with the "generosity and unselfish devotion" of those gathered in the ballroom to support "the cause of childhood" was a resounding success.<sup>274</sup>

The auctioneer style Wiggin employed here was unique within her oeuvre of speech-making, yet the tone was prevalent in many of the extant examples of speeches archived in the Quillcote Collection. A large number of the surviving

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<sup>272</sup> Smith, 104.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.



speeches are introductions of other authors at various clubs and literary organizations predominantly in New York and London. These focused on the persona of the guest of honor more than on Wiggin's own, despite the colloquial informality of tone that characterized many of her speeches. Far more intriguing is the undated manuscript of a speech hastily written in shorthand responding to an invitation to "engage in a discussion" with authors of both genders regarding whether women writers were "professionals or parasites."<sup>275</sup> Wiggin adopted a tone of gay incredulity at the opening of the speech, characterizing herself as both bewildered and amused by the topic and the organization sponsoring the event. To frame this characterization, she stated that the notion that "the possible female parasites were to pay for their own dinners amused me beyond words. The Dutch-treat theory was advanced so gaily and graciously, with such a boyish slap-on-the-back cordiality, that it brightened the occasion in advance."<sup>276</sup> By expressing her amusement over the idea of the women paying for their own meals, Wiggin purposely framed herself conservatively within the context of turn-of-the-century gender politics. However, throughout this text, she shifted her performance away from this conservative impression and embraced a more assertive public presence. She immediately and efficiently skewed the conservative frame, by remarking that:

The invitation gave me several shocks, none of them altogether disagreeable, though I confess I gasped when I read the list of topics suggested, apparently, by the surprising and somewhat unauthorized president of women writers in the universe. – "Are they filching ideas to a greater or lesser extent than their male counterparts?" or "Is any large proportion of their work being written for them by their men-friends?" (Oh! I would have paid for six dinners rather than miss this question). When I began reading the list I was an old-fashioned,

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<sup>275</sup> Untitled speech, Kate Douglas Wiggin, date unknown. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

conservative, mid-Victorian female. When I finished I was a rampant feminist!<sup>277</sup>

This excerpt exemplifies how Wiggin facilely reconstructed the frame of her performance as public speaker in the moment of presenting her materials, and contains emphatic notation to reinforce the technique. She acknowledged the topic of discussion as it was presented by the hosting organization, but immediately reshaped it to serve her own purpose. She then launched into a history of women writers from Sappho to George Eliot, using them as counter-evidence to the arguments raised in the initial invitation.

Wiggin capitalized on her ironic assumption of the role of rampant feminist through much of the body of the speech; however, she completed the frame of her personae as both writer and speaker by returning to her original presentation of self as an old-fashioned, conservative, mid-Victorian female writer.<sup>278</sup> Additionally, she framed her audience, which was comprised of both women and men, as her confidantes. Wiggin shrank the sphere of the public performance, giving it an air of intimacy, when she said:

If I had any vague, secret ambition towards the impossible ideal, I confess it would be to create some exquisite, silken-fine, fragrant, radiant, iridescent thing that would be lovely in itself and let everything else “go hang.” It wouldn’t hurt my feelings if the critics said nobody but a woman could have written it, though it might annoy the cheeky young man who elaborates these disconcerting questions.<sup>279</sup>

Wiggin successfully used this public speaking opportunity to air her views on the topic, yet effortlessly managed the impression of her presentation of self so that she

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

re-defined what a “rampant feminist” might be within the frame of respectable middle-class femininity.

Two speeches also found in the Quillcote Collection indicate how Wiggin foreshadowed a shift away from public speaking within the structure of the literary clubs and towards more actively philanthropic venues like those she found for her readings to raise funds for the Dorcas Society, an organization she helped found in 1897. One of these speeches was an introduction to the topic of the “City Beautiful.” In this document, Wiggin argued that “the building of a city [is] a poetic and splendid thing and truth to tell we do not take it seriously enough.”<sup>280</sup> She further stated that “it is the men for the most part that encourage, stimulate, defend and inspire” those who turn the vision of the City Beautiful into reality, and create urban environments that discourage “ugliness like vice.”<sup>281</sup> Here, Wiggin alluded to the support role women could and did perform from the private sphere as their work slowly moved out into the public sphere municipal housekeeping. Wiggin framed that movement from private to public, for her female supporters and for herself, as a natural outcome of the encouragement women offered to men.

While this speech created a passive role for women in the public sphere, a second speech, which Wiggin labeled “Philanthropy,” advanced her perception of women’s purpose in bettering society, and urged women to take a more active role in supporting progress in their communities.<sup>282</sup> Wiggin acknowledged that “the whole duty of woman is no easy thing in the present day” and that, as women accepted more

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<sup>280</sup> Untitled speech, Kate Douglas Wiggin, 8 December 1908. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Speech labeled “Philanthropy,” Kate Douglas Wiggin, date unknown. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

active roles in advocating for social improvements in the public sphere, there were “undiscovered worlds of responsibility” set before them.<sup>283</sup> As their position in both the public and private spheres fluctuated, Wiggin offered women an opportunity, employing the metaphorical trope of municipal housekeeping; engaging in municipal housekeeping allowed women to take an active role in the care, health, and education of their towns that expanded upon the role they took in their homes.

In the same speech, Wiggin couched her argument in a metaphor of the beehive:

We women cannot be content to be mere spectators, drones, consumers of the hardly served honey of the hive. We have learned enough of political economy and ethics to know that all must aid not only in the filling of the hive but in distributing the honey. The distribution of honey used to be such a simple matter in the dark ages. If women doled out to their less fortunate neighbors spoonsful [sic] of honey weekly or monthly they were considered as saints. Now the remorseful spirit of science has invaded our formerly easy going character. Before putting the honey into the open mouth we must learn whether the person has ever opened it before and if so how many times; whether his palate has been infused by a taste for something stronger than honey; whether he has ever produced any honey himself and what he did with the last honey we gave him.<sup>284</sup>

The beehive metaphor served Wiggin in several ways. First, she was able to assign a function for women within the community of bees. She discards for women the role of the male drone bee, and ascribes to women the role of the female worker bee, whose duties include keeping the hive clean and maintaining the comb, feeding the rest of the hive, and caring for the queen.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Stephen O. Adjare, *Beekeeping in Africa*, (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1990). Accessed online at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/t0104e/T0104E00.HTM>. Last accessed: 12 September 2008. See also C. R. Ribbands, “Division of Labour in the Honeybee Community,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*, 140 no. 898 (Aug. 27, 1952), 32-43.

**“Paying the Audience Which had Been So Dear”: Wiggin’s Performance of Philanthropy through Author’s Readings<sup>286</sup>**

The shift in rhetoric in the speeches analyzed above foreshadowed the transition in Wiggin’s persona as public speaker that engaged in speech-making, to one that once again embraced reading from the text of her literary works. Unlike the initial performance model of the orator and elocutionist that hinged on public utterance as a financially-based pursuit skirting the border between amateur and professional, this version of Wiggin’s self-expression had a marked philanthropic mission. Shortly after Wiggin secured Quillcote as her summer home in Hollis, Maine, she began to employ her elocutionary abilities for the benefit of the village.

Beginning in 1895, Wiggin ended each summer season in Hollis by presenting an evening entertainment at the Tory Hill Meeting House. Unlike her earlier public speaking phase, which featured performances of her already widely known works, these author’s readings and concerts featured her newest works. Most of Wiggin’s literary output from 1895 to 1911 was written or completed while she summered in Maine, and either “read by her in manuscript, or had their first hearing” as part of fundraisers for the Meeting House.<sup>287</sup> These readings, framed as unique philanthropic events at which Wiggin could give back to the community and to her “neighbors and friends the first taste of the literary feasts which are later spread for the delectation of

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<sup>286</sup> “Author’s Reading,” *Portland Daily Press* [Portland, ME], 1 September 1909.

<sup>287</sup> Program, Fifteenth Author’s Reading and Concert. Tory Hill Meeting House, Buxton Lower Corner, Maine, 23 August 1910. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

metropolitan and foreign epicures,” also afforded her the opportunity to consolidate several of her disparate acts of self-expression.<sup>288</sup>

Her performance as public speaker was naturally supported by the venue and context of the author’s readings; reviewers often remarked that while “many able writers are poor speakers and find themselves inadequate” in the role, “Mrs. Wiggin has no such handicap.”<sup>289</sup> Indeed, by reading from her latest manuscript, she also reinforced her role as author, with the added benefit of encouraging readership for the texts about to be published. These two roles reinforced each other to such an extent that those who witnessed her author’s readings “felt fully repaid” for their contribution, “so thoroughly delightful are the stories of Kate Douglas Wiggin, read, as only she can read them, with innumerable telling inflections and fascinating graces of manner.”<sup>290</sup> Wiggin’s persona performance as philanthropist also came into play at these readings staged for the benefit first of the Meeting House and later for the Dorcas Society; that presentation of self will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The most intriguing of these readings occurred in 1900, when she performed “The Author’s Readin’ at Bixby Center” prior to its publication in 1901.<sup>291</sup> As a metatheatrical performance, “The Author’s Readin’ at Bixby Center” was evocative of the area and the community environs of southern Maine that so informed Wiggin’s writing—and for whom she staged readings of her work. Written as a monologue, and set in a drawing room or country parlor, the speaker, Aunt Hitty, is “a village seamstress” who “uses her needle, her scissors, and her tongue with equal rapidity,”

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<sup>288</sup> “Author’s Reading,” *Portland Daily Press* [Portland, ME], 24 August 1910.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> “Author’s Reading,” *Portland Daily Press* [Portland, ME], 1 September 1909.

<sup>291</sup> Program, Fifteenth Author’s Reading and Concert, 23 August 1910. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

and regales a visitor with an account of the author's reading that the town's Winter Night Reading Club has just sponsored.<sup>292</sup> Wiggin captured the essence of a village woman in Hitty—and the essence of herself as the writer who came to read. Initially, her self-portrait is laudable, as Hitty relates that when the Winter Night Club wrote to the author “and told her they wa’n’t goin’ to spare expense, and she could have five dollars and railroad fare if she’d come and read,” the author responded by saying it “would be pleasure and profit enough to meet the committee” and she would not charge a fee.<sup>293</sup> This characterization of the author worked for Wiggin in two ways. First, it framed her benevolently, willing to deny herself profit for the good of the cause. However, it also allowed her a moment of ironic commentary, because the five dollars offered by the committee was well under her own speaking fee of one hundred dollars. In fact, as she noted in one response to a request to speak, her fee was quite reasonable, given that “it has been practically demonstrated that from \$200 to \$400 over this amount is made” in profit from her speaking engagements.<sup>294</sup>

Wiggin's pointed commentary in her performance as author reading for charity parodied some of her own early experiences as a public speaker. In particular, Wiggin connected the manner in which the Winter Night Club of Bixby Center set the stage for their author to her own experience discussed previously in this chapter.<sup>295</sup> In comparison, Aunt Hitty regales her visitor with a description of how one of the young women of the community, who had been to other Author's Readings, “offered to

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<sup>292</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “The Author's Readin' at Bixby Centre,” in *The Quilt of Happiness* (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1924), 39.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>294</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, to Miss Rodman, 1 November 1892. Maine Women Writers Collection. Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine.

<sup>295</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 233-234.

decorate the platform just like a parlor” and borrowed items to do so from her neighbors in the community, so that “the audience stared so at the decorations they didn’t pay no kind of attention to the reader.”<sup>296</sup> By recounting her own public speaking experiences as an author in this format, Wiggin is able to both jest at her experiences and acknowledge the debt she owed to some of the communities and organizations that shaped her coherent expression of self as author, as orator, and as philanthropist.

**“Correctness in writing and speaking is no slight affair”: Integrating the iterations of the Persona of Public Speaker<sup>297</sup>**

In *Correct Writing and Speaking* (1904), Mary Augusta Jordan stated that “correctness in writing and speaking is no slight affair. It is not easy in the getting or the keeping. It is, first of all, dependent on personal character. It rises and falls in value with the personal and social virtues.”<sup>298</sup> As a public speaker, Kate Douglas Wiggin embodied this idea, and created a performance of self that she actively managed within the fluctuating framework of the public sphere. From elocution to speech-making to author’s reading, Wiggin illustrated she was capable of negotiating her speaking engagements so that she could support the rhetoric of reform, particularly in education, that formed the basis of her own philanthropic agenda, without compromising her personal character, her virtue, or “the moral health of the nation” as was feared in the silencing atmosphere of the postbellum period.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Wiggin, “Author’s Readin’ at Bixby Center,” 48-49.

<sup>297</sup> Jordan, 312.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid..

<sup>299</sup> Kerber, 204.



During her speaking engagements, Wiggin rarely spoke directly on the topic which her appearance supported; particularly in her early career as a writer and orator, she quickly learned that philanthropy and entertainment could be effectively intertwined. She performed her work for charitable functions that raised money for educational and social organizations, reading from her work without overtly classifying her selections according to any thematic overlaps with the charities sponsoring any given event. Her philanthropic endeavors were “staged” rather than spoken. She most often framed her performance in a parlor entertainment context that would reinforce the philanthropic message of the event as well as amuse and divert her primarily middle-class spectators.

## Chapter 4: “Adventures in Playmaking”<sup>300</sup>: Wiggin’s Dramatic Collaborations and Adaptations

As seen throughout this work, the theatrical and the performative permeate much of Kate Douglas Wiggin’s life. Her association with professional performers such as Annie Louise Cary and Dion Boucicault, the emphasis on play and performance in her espousal of Froebel’s teaching philosophies, and the performance techniques and conscious theatrical positioning inherent in her public speaking and staged readings naturally led Wiggin to embrace the traditions and trappings of the stage. While Wiggin never embraced a professional career as an actor, she found alternative ways to embrace the theatrical. In a 1919 article for *Good Housekeeping* titled “Reminiscences of a Late Playwright,” Wiggin pointed to her experiences as an elocutionist, and particularly the readings she performed of her own works for large numbers of children, as part of the impetus to adapt her work to dramatic form:

Striving to make them [her characters] live before my responsive crowds of young people, seeing exactly where and when they evoked smiles, laughs, tears, parted lips, glowing cheeks, sparkling eyes, I could not help wondering whether they could be woven into a form where they would appeal to a mixed audience containing grown-ups.<sup>301</sup>

As mentioned previously, Wiggin’s transition from public speaking and solo performance to playwriting as an act of self-expression may also owe some of its stimulus to the rhetorical structuring of her married self as restricted from public speaking by her husband. As Wiggin integrated the role of playwright into her acts of

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<sup>300</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “Reminiscences of a Late Playwright,” *Good Housekeeping* (July, 1919), 151.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

self-expression, she incorporated rhetorical strategies that positioned her as both mother and servant in order to reinforce the conservative construction of femininity that she continued to embrace.

In this chapter, I explore how Wiggin characterized her persona as playwright as maternal protector of her brood of characters and as an author serving the demands of her readers by adapting her work to the stage.<sup>302</sup> Wiggin reinforced her use of these two rhetorical roles when she chose to work in collaboration on *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *Mother Carey's Chickens*, and *The Birds' Christmas Carol*. Her role is only slightly re-characterized in the adaptation of *The Old Peabody Pew* which she undertook independently. Prior to delving into an analysis of the shifting nature of the rhetorical strategies used in Wiggin's performance as playwright in the dramatization of all four of these plays, I will offer a brief overview of the position of female playwrights in early twentieth century America. To contextualize the social framing of Wiggin's playwriting, I also analyze how Wiggin framed her playwriting persona. I argue that her continued use of rhetorical strategies that hearken back to nineteenth-century ideals of femininity, which predate the rise of the New Woman and the Suffrage Movement, work to reinforce the cohesive and coherent expression of self that identity performance demands.

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<sup>302</sup> While Wiggin also participated in the filming of an early silent film of *Timothy's Quest*, she did write a script for the work. Therefore, this film, as well as other film adaptations of her work, will remain outside the focus of this chapter.

## **“All the Trappings of the Man-made Stage”<sup>303</sup>: Wiggin’s Playwright Persona in the Professional Theatre**

While twentieth century theatre historiography has often been reduced to a binary focus of either popular entertainment exemplified by vaudeville or the professionalization of Broadway industry, recent scholarship cautions readers against oversimplification. In their multivolume *Cambridge History of the American Theatre*, Don Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby acknowledge that “within this period American playwriting is redeemed by modernist understanding” and “garish spectacle is tamed and refined by the ‘new stagecraft.’”<sup>304</sup> However, playwriting and production of the era defy easy categorization; Wilmeth and Bigsby point out that the period is often short-changed historically, despite “superlative examples of stylish comedy and melodrama, social thesis plays, sensational mystery, rollicking farce, and sophisticated spectacle...with a sprinkling of poetic drama.”<sup>305</sup> The turn of the century marked a prolific time in American playwriting as playwrights and producers sought to capitalize on the burgeoning working and middle classes’ search for amusements in their leisure time. As Felicia Londré attests, “demand for theatrical entertainment of all sorts, from provocative dramas to farce to musical comedies and variety performance, sparked competition and an openness to novelty and experimentation.”<sup>306</sup> Despite this experimental spirit, Wiggin met with mixed success by opting to align her dramatic work with mainstream sentimentality.

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<sup>303</sup> Augusta Stevenson, *Children’s Classics in Dramatic Form: Book Two* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), iii.

<sup>304</sup> Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*. Volume two: 1870-1945, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>306</sup> Felicia Londré H. and Daniel J. Watermeier, *History of North American Theatre* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 261.

Londré acknowledges that the era was marked by a certain degree of paradoxical tension when she states in *The History of North American Theatre*, “it was generally a progressive, exuberant time, but not entirely a ‘golden age.’ Prosperity nurtured a shallow consumerism; mobility, paradoxically, fostered rootlessness.”<sup>307</sup> Due in part to the demands of a newly urbanized middle class, one of the significant themes of the era’s dramaturgy focused on the tension between city and country, urban and rural. In his 1923 discussion of drama, literary scholar Percy Boynton pointed to the proliferation of plays focusing in particular on rural life: “the more serious human studies are in the smaller places, and parallel the stories of the village or of the revolt from the village that figure so largely in the contemporary novel.”<sup>308</sup> While most of the plays that utilized this city/country motif did so by featuring “neat oppositions (usually sentimental and moralistic) rather than complex contradictions and ambiguities,” this binary eventually gave way to plays with plots pointing to the tensions underlying migration and urbanization, and the relative rootlessness that characterized those leaving behind their rural past.<sup>309</sup> Wiggin’s two professionally produced plays, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *Mother Carey’s Chickens*, participated in this debate between rural and urban, presenting with varying degrees of subtlety an argument in support of the simpler, sentimentalized rural way of life. However, the two plays garnered drastically different critical responses as the tension between rural and urban culminated in urban progressive culture overwhelming the nostalgia for the rural. The audience’s sentimental response to the

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Percy H. Boynton, “American Authors of Today: X. The Drama,” *The English Journal* 12, no. 6 (June 1923), 413.

<sup>309</sup> Wilmeth and Bigsby, 147.

rural idyll waned markedly during Wiggin's playwriting years. Subsequently, rather than change the themes and content of her work, Wiggin shifted her focus to a different target audience, writing *Birds' Christmas Carol* and *The Old Peabody Pew* for amateur players who were members of the communities about which she wrote.

The position of professional women playwrights was well established during the Progressive Era, despite how theatre history has chosen to remember the playwriting of the time.<sup>310</sup> While some professional female playwrights, such as Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell, and Rachel Crothers, have been placed in the canon, many more have been forgotten or supplanted as the sentimental, romantic style in which they wrote fell out of favor. Sherry Engle's article, "An 'Irruption of Women Dramatists': The Rise of America's Woman Playwright, 1890-1920," notes that in the Progressive Era "fifty-one women dramatists achieved two or more productions between 1890 and 1920" and "eighteen came into prominence with five or more Broadway stagings of plays or musicals," including Rachel Crothers.<sup>311</sup> Engle posits that the erasure of so many female playwrights may be due in equal part to the number of those who were "playing a subservient role within the production process, tailoring dramatic work to fit star performers or making changes to appease theatre managers, who in turn sought to satisfy the paying public."<sup>312</sup> Wiggin epitomized this subservient role, not only within the production process, but in her characterization of herself as a playwright.

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<sup>310</sup> Yvonne Shafer, *American Women Playwrights, 1900-1950*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 462.

<sup>311</sup> Sherry Engle, "An 'Irruption of Women Dramatists': The Rise of America's Woman Playwright, 1890-1920," *New England Theatre Journal* 12 (2001): 31. Engle's recently published book, *New Women Dramatists in America, 1890-1920* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) expands on the work of this article, and provides an in-depth study into previously marginalized women playwrights of the era.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Despite the major in-roads women made into the profession, they still faced opposition and denigration from some critics. One of the more vocal critiques came from Brander Matthews, a preeminent dramatic critic at the turn of the twentieth century who was a regular contributor to *The Saturday Review* and Columbia University's first professor of dramatic literature. As late as 1916, Matthews cited what he felt was the dearth of women playwrights, ignoring the number of women who had plays produced in New York at the time. In his *A Book About the Theatre*, Matthews asserted two "factual" explanations for what he perceived as a lack of women in the playwriting profession: "first the fact that women are likely to have only a definitely limited knowledge of life, and, second, the fact that they are likely also to be more or less deficient in the faculty of construction."<sup>313</sup> Although this was an antiquated assertion even for his own time, Matthews' contention underscores a mindset against which women of the era still struggled.

In the same text, Matthews commented on the growing trend of novelists exploring the playwriting genre: "The novelists of the twentieth century, so far from holding the drama to be an inferior form, are discovering that it is at least a more difficult form, and therefore artistically more attractive."<sup>314</sup> Despite his opinion on their ability to succeed in the craft, Matthews acknowledged a growing opportunity particularly for women novelists to explore the dramatic form: adaptation. Between 1900 and 1920, several significant novels written by women were adapted for the stage: in addition to Wiggin's enormously popular *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, adaptations of Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna*, and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

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<sup>313</sup> Brander Matthews, *A Book About the Theatre*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 124-125.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

each ran on Broadway for over a hundred performances.<sup>315</sup> While not all dramatic adaptations were undertaken collaboratively with the original author, Wiggin represented the two possible entry points to the field of playwriting for women that Engle identifies: adapting her best-selling novel to the stage in order to protect her interests in the face of lax copyright laws, and collaborating with an already established dramatist.<sup>316</sup> However pragmatic these entry points seem, Wiggin chose never to capitalize on her practicality or professional acumen in her presentation of self, and consistently represented herself publicly as naïve in business affairs.

### **“I Could Protect the Spirit of My Own Book”<sup>317</sup>: The Framework of Wiggin’s Performance of her Playwriting Persona**

In her early statements about her role as playwright, Wiggin positioned herself as the protective mother shepherding her literary children into the great urban landscape of professional theatre. In a 1910 article in *Harper’s Bazaar* at the time of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*’s Broadway launch, Wiggin referred to herself as Rebecca’s “joyous and somewhat accidental parent” and argued that she undertook the dramatic adaptation of her novel in order to “protect the spirit of my own book, and preserve its simplicity, better than anyone else.”<sup>318</sup> By doing so, she played the role of watchful parent to her character-child as well, and admonished, “of course, if she fails I shall have been a very cruel literary mother, dragging my child from the

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<sup>315</sup> According to the Internet Broadway Database (ibdb.com), *Little Women* ran for 184 performances at the Playhouse Theatre in the 1912-1913 season, and Klaw and Erlanger, perhaps building on the success they garnered with *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, produced *Pollyanna* at the Hudson Theatre in 1916 where it ran for 112 performances.

<sup>316</sup> Engle, 32, 41.

<sup>317</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 398.

<sup>318</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, “My First Play,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (October, 1910), 44.



spot where she was appreciated and beloved, and transplanting her to one where people might shake their heads at her and say, ‘We don’t like you at all. Why didn’t you stay at Sunnybrook Farm where you belonged?’”<sup>319</sup> Wiggin’s writing revealed a concern for her literary “children” that paralleled her concern for the children she helped educate in her own kindergarten, and through her work supporting the Free Kindergarten movement in the United States.

As Wiggin developed her role as a playwright, the rhetoric of her performance of self expanded beyond literary mother to public servant. Wiggin shifted the construct of her persona as playwright to include the image of one who, in crafting her work for the stage, simply submitted to the external pressures of public demand. Wiggin used terms such as “besieged,” “bombarded,” “beguiled,” and “browbeaten” to describe what she characterized as a mandate to write for the stage. In “Reminiscences of a Late Playwright,” Wiggin stated, “I should never have undertaken the task had I not been cajoled, indeed almost browbeaten into” writing *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.<sup>320</sup> In both “Reminiscences of a Late Playwright” and *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin referred to a “positive bombardment in the shape of beseechments” from her young admirers to adapt her story into scenes that they could enact.<sup>321</sup> While these statements appear as justifications of her decision to become a playwright, they can also be seen as another way in which Wiggin constructed her identity based upon her work. Wiggin framed her role as playwright as one she undertook only to serve the demands of others. In this instance, Wiggin clearly chose

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Wiggin, “Reminiscences,” 148.

<sup>321</sup> Wiggin, “Reminiscences,” 148 and *My Garden of Memory*, 396. This is one of many examples of Wiggin borrowing from her earlier writing to complete her autobiography. In *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin changes ‘beseechments’ to ‘beseechings’.

to foreground her role as benevolent playwright, as opposed to one of professional, profit-bound considerations.

Both rhetorical stances—the literary mother and the benevolent playwright—build upon the conservative positioning of women and womanhood that frame so much of Wiggin’s life and work. Both the literary mother and the benevolent playwright are images that hearken back to the concepts of Republican Motherhood and municipal housekeeping. They continued to be key principles for women’s involvement in public and professional life in the nineteenth century, and informed the early rise of the Woman’s Club Movement. While these strategies of public positioning had clearly waned by the beginning of the twentieth century (in no small part due to the tenacity of the Suffrage Movement and its corollaries) the more conservative rhetoric better suited Wiggin’s performance of self, and the characters she dramatized.

Despite the fact that she only dramatized four of her novels, and only one of these received a truly successful Broadway run, Wiggin devoted two chapters of her autobiography to her playwriting endeavors: “Adventures of a Playwright” and “Rebecca Goes to London.”<sup>322</sup> The first chapter borrowed heavily from two previous magazine articles she wrote on the subject, and focused primarily on the adaptation of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. The second chapter roamed beyond the subject of that play’s tepid reception in London, and covered all of Wiggin’s dramatic adaptations. In addition to *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, Wiggin adapted *The Birds’ Christmas Carol*, *The Old Peabody Pew*, and *Mother Carey’s Chickens*. Each act of adaptation,

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<sup>322</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 393; 403. In contrast, only one chapter of the autobiography is focused solely on her literary oeuvre.

and Wiggin's subsequent accounts of her role in the process, offer unique insight into Wiggin's identity as playwright, and serve as intriguing historical markers of both professional and amateur theatre in early twentieth-century America.

**"It seemed better to start with Rebecca...."**<sup>323</sup>

As discussed at the opening of this chapter, Wiggin adopted a persona founded on the conceit that she was being strongly urged to adapt her work to the stage. In "My First Play," she posited that "the dramatization of a book presents greater risks than most other forms of playwriting," but figured it somehow "presented fewer difficulties to the novice."<sup>324</sup> As an act of self-expression, Wiggin's early writing about adapting *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* to the stage rhetorically characterized her first dramatization as an innocent foray into a new world, with Wiggin as much a naïve babe in treacherous woods as Rebecca. Indeed, Wiggin acknowledged in her autobiography that "the adventures, even of a modest playwright, are markedly different from those of an author."<sup>325</sup> Wiggin characterized of her entry into playwriting as an endeavor that she hesitated to undertake alone.

Charlotte Thompson was a minor playwright in the early part of the twentieth century, having written only one play produced on Broadway by the time of her association with Wiggin and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. Thompson's play, *The Strength of the Weak*, ran for only twenty-seven performances in 1906. Reviewers commented that "several of the most trying and crucial scenes of the new play are so badly written and constructed that a large amount of the actress's resourcefulness is

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<sup>323</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 398.

<sup>324</sup> Wiggin, "My First Play," 44.

<sup>325</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 413.

wasted in covering up the defects of the dramatists.”<sup>326</sup> However, it is likely that Wiggin chose Thompson as a collaborator based on the latter’s work undertaking the adaptation of Margaret Deland’s popular novel *The Awakening of Helena Ritchie*, which met with greater success. *The Awakening of Helena Ritchie* ran for over a hundred performances, overlapping with *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*’s tour prior to its Broadway debut, and garnering reviews that specifically applauded Thompson for creating a dramatization that “preserves more of the qualities of the book than is ordinarily found” in adaptations.<sup>327</sup> Given Wiggin’s protective attitude toward her characters and her books, it is likely that Thompson’s ability to stay true to the original text brought her to Wiggin’s attention as a potential collaborator.

While the professional relationship between the two writers was characterized as having sprung from a prior friendship, it is unclear whether or not that was simply a convenient conceit on Wiggin’s part or if they were acquainted prior to their professional collaboration. One early review referred to their friendship, but intimated that Wiggin had to be persuaded to allow Thompson to undertake the dramatization.<sup>328</sup> Intriguingly, the reviewer downplays the collaborative act of this piece, instead insisting the work is primarily Thompson’s, and that she was “finally allowed to proceed with the dramatization, subject to revision by Mrs. Wiggin.”<sup>329</sup> This is the only recorded instance of inconsistency in the public representation of Wiggin’s first attempt at professional dramatization; other reviews and Wiggin’s own

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<sup>326</sup> Review of *The Strength of the Weak*, by Alice M. Smith and Charlotte Thompson (Liberty Theatre, New York), *The New York Times*, 18 April 1906.

<sup>327</sup> Review of *The Awakening of Helena Ritchie*, by Charlotte Thompson (Savoy Theater, New York, NY), *New York Times*, 21 September 1909.

<sup>328</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Tremont Theater, Boston, MA), *The Boston Journal*, 29 December 1909.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

discussion of the playwriting process in interviews, articles, and her autobiography, contradict this representation of the collaborative process on *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, and serve to support the identity of lady dramatist that Wiggin enacted.

Wiggin and Thompson developed a close working rapport during the summer of 1908 as they worked on the adaptation at Wiggin's summer home in Maine.

However, they did not necessarily work *together* on the collaboration, and indeed, they worked in completely separate spaces at Quillcote that summer. In "My First Play," Wiggin outlined their typical work day:

I retired to my study to write the acts aforesaid, she into the Quillcote barn to work out the thousand and one details, and to plan new wonders for me to perform should I show any ability in that direction. From study to barn we flitted back and forth, I to find her deep in the progression of scenes, stage business, consideration of scenery, exits and entrances of characters...<sup>330</sup>

The collaborative process in which Wiggin and Thompson were engaged was not one in which they necessarily worked side by side to structure a moment in the play.

Rather, the collaboration appears to be largely one of Wiggin as playwright of dialogue and plot and Thompson as manager of stage business. While this is indeed collaboration, it is not collaboration on the text of the play, but rather on the construction of the overall performative features.

The distance between the two co-authors appears to have manifested itself in different ways, from their physical separation at Quillcote to the different aspects of the play on which they worked. This separation may have been more because of tension between the two women than for any artistic reason; or perhaps, as Wiggin wrote in a letter to a friend, the fact that they would "argue and discuss and fight; I for Rebecca and she for dramatic situation," which raised the level of strain and stress

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<sup>330</sup> Wiggin, "My First Play," 44.

between them.<sup>331</sup> In either case, an entry into the Quillcote guestbook, however tongue-in-cheek, clearly illustrates the tension. Upon her departure from Quillcote after the completion of the dramatization of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, Wiggin wrote an odd poetic homage to Thompson next to a photograph of the departing playwright taken on the grounds of Wiggin's summer house. In it, Wiggin referred to the length of Thompson's stay, bemoaning that the summer had been entirely spent with the "tall and dark and sassy" collaborator, and that Thompson had worn out her welcome with the residents of Quillcote: "'Oh, travel, travel on! How can we make her?' Cried the fam'ly. 'Can we shake her?'"<sup>332</sup> Despite the impression that Wiggin gives here that Thompson's stay and the work on the dramatization of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* consumed the summer of 1908, Wiggin's final guestbook entry of the season notes that while she "wrote the play of 'Rebecca' with assistance of Charlotte Thompson—I doing all dialogue—all the conversation spoken in the play" she also managed to finish a 7000 word article for *The Century* called "Venetian Sketches," as well as the novella *Susanna and Sue*.<sup>333</sup>

Whatever the underlying tensions may have been, the working relationship proved extremely productive, and in interviews leading up to the Broadway opening, Wiggin insisted that Thompson's aid was invaluable. A *New York Times* reporter noted that "Mrs. Wiggin appeared to fear that Miss Thompson would not receive all the credit she deserved for her share in the work of making the play," and Wiggin specifically outlined the division of labor between herself, whose role included

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<sup>331</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin to "Dearest Girl," 10 July 1908. From the Maine Women Writers Collection, Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine.

<sup>332</sup> The Quillcote Guestbook. Courtesy of The Salmon Falls Library and Tea Room, Hollis, Maine.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

undertaking all the dialogue, and Thompson, who delivered the dramaturgical expertise in the structure and stage directions.<sup>334</sup> This sentiment was repeated in several early reviews of the play as it toured prior to its Broadway run. Wiggin made sure to acknowledge Thompson's input at an early performance of the play in Portland, Maine: in a curtain speech at the Jefferson Theater she demurred, "some of the applause belongs to Charlotte Thompson whose technical aid has been such a source of strength to the play."<sup>335</sup> Later in the tour, Wiggin would again insist, "I was fortunate in my collaborator, Miss Charlotte Thompson, who helped me construct the very simple scenario required, and assisted me in getting the material into four acts, so that I could write the play."<sup>336</sup> Unlike the earlier review that credited Thompson's dramatization with Wiggin's final approval of the text, Wiggin here positioned herself as the primary force behind the adaptation, characterizing Thompson as a technical advisor. Wiggin's crediting of Thompson's "technical aid" on the "very simple scenario required" seemed calculated to draw attention to the creative aspects of the collaborative process which Wiggin maintained for herself. By describing Thompson's aid as akin to the journeyman, Wiggin claimed the artistic end and sensibility, which allowed her to operate in the professional world while staying above the day-to-day workings of it.

However significant Thompson's collaboration and advice may have been in the process of translating *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* to the stage, by the time

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<sup>334</sup> Interview of Kate Douglas Wiggin, "A Novelist's First Play," *The New York Times*, 25 September 1910.

<sup>335</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Jefferson Theater, Portland, Maine), *Portland Evening Express*, 30 November 1909. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>336</sup> Quoted in a review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (unknown theater, Bridgeport, Connecticut) unknown newspaper, 20 April 1910. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

Wiggin wrote her autobiography, her acknowledgement of Thompson's contribution had waned remarkably. While Wiggin did state that she had the aid of a collaborator in the adaptation process, she did not mention Thompson by name, and completely glossed over the process itself, speeding from introducing the topic to "the play was finished, and still more remarkable, was accepted for early production. Even more marvelous, the managers who purchased it were those who controlled massive theatrical enterprises."<sup>337</sup> Despite the emphasis she put on the writing process at the time of production, by the end of her career, she shifted the framework of her persona as the playwright of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and downplayed the work of adaptation in favor of a more detailed construct of her active role in the rehearsal process.

In *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin's memory of the rehearsal process is painted with the patina of nostalgia, and is a significant restructuring of her initial reaction to the rehearsal as a mode of self-expression for her. In a 1910 review of the pre-Broadway tour of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, she told a reporter, "I am always down-hearted during rehearsals. During the performances in the evening I am at the height of my happiness. I lean so much to the natural that rehearsals jar me."<sup>338</sup> By referring to rehearsals as unnatural and jarring, Wiggin implied that she was not comfortable with performing, and not someone who performs. Given the performative nature of so much of her life and work as noted in previous chapters, this assertion of her own naturalness and the assumption of a spontaneous native

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<sup>337</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 399.

<sup>338</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Tremont Theatre, Boston, MA), *The Boston Journal*, January 1910. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.



genius reads as highly disingenuous. Second, Wiggin aligns the *performances*, not rehearsals, with her initial expressive act: the act of writing the novel and then the play. To have other people express themselves through her work—her own act of self-expression—was troubling for her. In that same article, the reporter went on to discuss how Wiggin participated in the rehearsal process, and “frequently interrupted the actors and actresses to suggest how their part should be interpreted.”<sup>339</sup> Wiggin attempted to reassert her role as the expressive epicenter for her characters and the play. As a novelist, Wiggin was used to having the dominant voice; even in her collaborative novels with the Findlater sisters and Charlotte Stuart, Wiggin took the role of the heroine for herself and even provided the impetus for their first work together.<sup>340</sup> As a dramatist, Wiggin may have been uncomfortable with the lesser role she played in the rehearsal and production process.

Indeed, her contextualization of the rehearsal process is in direct contrast to Wiggin’s structuring of it in her autobiography. Perhaps in an attempt to recuperate the process for herself, or perhaps simply due to time’s erasure of the details, by the end of her life, Wiggin had recast herself in the rehearsal process: no longer was she “down-hearted” by rehearsals. Instead, “the whole experience of the work with the stage-director [Lawrence Marston], which preceded rehearsals, and the rehearsals themselves—all this was delightful, illuminating, and chastening, and I issued from the experience wiser as well as humbler.”<sup>341</sup> Furthermore, Wiggin re-characterized her interaction with the actors in rehearsal, de-emphasizing her interpretive

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 341-345. Wiggin, along with Mary and Jane Findlater and Charlotte Stuart, collaboratively penned *An Affair at the Inn* (1904) and *Robinetta* (1909).

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 399.

suggestions to the actors, and focusing instead on acting on suggestions from the cast (and even the crew) and re-writing portions of the text during the rehearsal process:

I “wrote in” bits of dialogue, at rehearsal, for delightful persons who had not nearly enough to say for the salaries they received. I took home certain pathetic scenes very dear to me, and brought them back next day wreathed in smiles; as everybody concerned, from the Olympian head himself to the fourth stage assistant, detested tears and approved of laughter, both on moral and financial grounds.<sup>342</sup>

Between the newspaper article of 1910 and *My Garden of Memory* in 1923, Wiggin reshaped the perception of her image and role in the rehearsal process, metamorphosing it from over-eager novelist and novice playwright uncomfortable with the process and her diminished role therein, to that of a self-assured, benevolent creative artist willing to adapt herself and her writing to the needs and desires of all those concerned in the production.

This transition from down-hearted to delighted by the rehearsal process serves as an interesting contrast to Wiggin’s response to the reviews of the production. Several early reviews of the out-of-town tryouts have been previously mentioned in this chapter; others point to the possible “improvements” Wiggin may have made during rehearsals, and noted that “the artistic in the play is never lost sight of, it is never sacrificed for some lesser thing, the guffaw or the hysterical sob. All the crises are quiet ones, its deepest action is the action of the solitudes.”<sup>343</sup> Wiggin’s revisions that removed the pathetic in favor of a more light-hearted rendering of the scenes seemed to have been prudent; another early review also acknowledged Wiggin’s skill at making the difficult transition from page to stage: “Mrs. Wiggin has successfully

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<sup>342</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 398-400.

<sup>343</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Jefferson Theatre, Portland, ME), *Portland Evening Express*, 2 December 1909. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

accomplished the difficult task of transferring her own creations from the pages of a book to the boards of a stage without loss of their natural charm in the process.”<sup>344</sup> One could argue that, with the aid of hindsight, Wiggin saw an opportunity in her autobiography to recast her role in transforming *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* by placing the emphasis on her active role during the rehearsal process rather than on her partnership with Charlotte Thompson.

The New York reviews also emphasized the balance Thompson and Wiggin struck between the comic and the sentimental without calling attention to the mechanics of the text itself. The *New York Sun* reviewer expressed mild surprise that “many sophisticated theatergoers marvelled that they liked *Rebecca*, a play which displays so little of dramaturgics; but they enjoyed it just the same....”<sup>345</sup> The London response to *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* was not so forgiving of the emphasis on sentimentality over action, as was highlighted in a special cable to the *New York Times* following the London debut. The reviewer noted that, while the largely American audience reacted favorably to the performance, “one experienced judge said that the excessive sentimentality and occasional ‘namby-pambyism’ of the piece would not be to the taste of British metropolitan audiences.”<sup>346</sup> The dispatch summarized the mediocre reviews that the play received in the London papers, and relayed that while *The Morning Post* encouraged audiences to “make friends with *Rebecca*,” and *The Daily Express* found the production to be “very pretty, very

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<sup>344</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (unknown theater, Bridgeport, Connecticut) unknown newspaper, 20 April 1910. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>345</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (unknown theatre, New York), *The New York Sun*, October, 1912. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>346</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Charles Frohman’s Globe Theatre, London), *The New York Times*, 3 September 1912.

harmless,” *The Daily Mail* labeled it “a slight play of such obvious sentiment,” and *The Times* called it “all very scrappy and unsubstantial.”<sup>347</sup> The London production of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* closed prematurely a month after its debut.

In the days immediately following the London opening, Wiggin was already at work managing her representation as playwright in the media. While another special cable from London ran in *The New York Times* under the headline “Critics Wound Miss Wiggin: Author of ‘Rebecca’ Resents London Comments on her Company,” the reviewer quotes her as taking exception not to the judgment handed down on the plot and structure of the play, but to the criticism pointed at the cast.<sup>348</sup> In the article, Wiggin referred to the London critics as “ruffianly,” and stated that “it is the first time in my life that I have ever experienced such a thing...but I suppose I need chastening before I die.”<sup>349</sup> However, she used the review as a forum to hearken back to the pre-performance publicity she had undertaken prior to the Broadway opening of the play, but again characterizing herself as the mother/caretaker of not only the children of her story, but the “children” of the acting company. She chastised the press, “I don’t mind, so far as the play is concerned. I never claimed that it was anything great, but when the critics attack the company, even saying nasty things about my sweet little children, it is more than I can stand.”<sup>350</sup> While Wiggin’s concern for the young actors may have been genuine, the “sweet little children” to which she refers, including Edith Taliaferro, who originated the role of Rebecca, were seasoned stage veterans in

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Charles Frohman’s Globe Theatre, London), *The New York Times*, 8 September 1912.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

their teens. It would be several years before Wiggin would entrust another stage adaptation of her work to commercial theatre.

**“Its prevailing sweetness bears its own antidote”:<sup>351</sup> *Mother Carey’s Chickens* and the changing sentiment of the audience**

The London reception of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* may have made Wiggin hesitant about attempting another commercial adaptation of her work. However, she made one more attempt at professional playwriting when she paired with Rachel Crothers to bring *Mother Carey’s Chickens* from page to stage. Unlike Charlotte Thompson, Crothers was already a well-established and highly visible commercial playwright. As Colette Lindroth explains in her study of Crothers,

From the beginning to the end of her career, Crothers received substantial critical attention, most of it positive. For thirty years critics were nearly unanimous in their praise of her ability in structuring the “well-made play,” citing her skill in reaching the audience, her deft use of both comedy and pathos, the effective pacing of her action, and, above all, her ability to create memorable characters.<sup>352</sup>

Crothers worked within the conventional dramaturgy of the time to present issues and themes concerning women and independence in a manner that not only had wide appeal, but that brought her respect as a professional playwright on par with the major male dramatists of the day. This was significant not only in transitioning notice of her work from the society pages where other female playwrights were relegated, but brought the issues of the role of women to the fore in interesting ways.<sup>353</sup> In looking

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<sup>351</sup> Review of *Mother Carey’s Chickens* by Kate Douglas Wiggin and Rachel Crothers (Cort Theatre, New York) *New York Times*, 30 September 1917.

<sup>352</sup> Colette Lindroth, “Rachel Crothers.” In *American Playwrights, 1880-1945: A Research and Production Sourcebook*, ed. William W. Demastes (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 73.

<sup>353</sup> Engle, 41.

back at the era, Wiggin made a wise choice in selecting Crothers as a collaborator. Scholar Brenda Murphy summed up prevailing thought when she labeled Crothers “the most significant woman playwright in the United States produced in the early twentieth century.”<sup>354</sup> While critics of her later work condemned her for “writing for the time only,” and creating “problems for the stage, not for too close scrutiny,” her early work was noted for the deftness with which it treated the shifting role of independent women in society.<sup>355</sup> From her first Broadway play, *A Man’s World*, which met with generally favorable reviews and successfully launched a commercial career spanning nearly four decades, Crothers focused on what was known as the “woman problem.” Keith Newlin describes the “woman problem” as “the debate over the ‘proper’ role of women in a rapidly changing and increasingly industrialized society.”<sup>356</sup> Crothers herself felt that “with few exceptions, every one of my plays has been a social attitude toward women at the moment I wrote it...it is something that comes to me subconsciously. I may say that I sense the trend even before I have hearsay or direct knowledge of it.”<sup>357</sup> Part of Crothers’s appeal to Wiggin as a potential collaborator may have been that she was, as J. K. Curry asserts, “a highly visible model of a modern career woman” who simultaneously operated in a conventional dramaturgical mode, “focused on mainstream, commercial success.”<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Brenda Murphy, “Feminism and the Marketplace: the Career of Rachel Crothers,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 82.

<sup>355</sup> Montrose J. Moses, *Representative American Dramas: National and Local* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1929), 449.

<sup>356</sup> Keith Newlin, ed. *American Plays of the New Woman*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 2.

<sup>357</sup> Quoted in Judith E. Barlow, ed. *Plays by American Women: 1900-1930*. (New York: Applause, 1981), xv. Quote not attributed

<sup>358</sup> J. K. Curry, “Rachel Crothers: An Exceptional Woman in a Man’s World,” in *Staging Desire: Queer Readings of American Theater History*, ed. Kim Marra and Robert A. Schanke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 55.

This access to commercial viability could certainly have been a key factor in Wiggin's decision to work with Crothers on *Mother Carey's Chickens*.

The dramatic form of *Mother Carey's Chickens* was not adapted and produced until 1917, before Crothers revised *He and She* for a successful Broadway run, and immediately following her adaptation of Louise Forsslund's novel, *Our Lady 31*. In Crothers's career, as in Wiggin's, the dramatization of *Mother Carey's Chickens* was relegated to the background as a "sentimental failure" that ran for just thirty-nine performances.<sup>359</sup> Scholar Lois Gottlieb posits that the failure was due to Crothers' close collaboration with Wiggin in which "she did little more than transfer into a physical setting and spoken dialogue the themes, characters, and atmosphere of Wiggins's [sic] fiction."<sup>360</sup> However, Gottlieb offers no evidence to support her assertion, and Wiggin was mute on the subject.

When Wiggin cast herself as playwright in *My Garden of Memory*, her memory skips over any in-depth discussion of the collaborative process with Crothers. While Crothers is mentioned by name in Wiggin's autobiography, she offers no opinion on the association, and immediately skips forward to the cast and the performances. In addition, Wiggin's discussion of *Mother Carey's Chickens* was folded into the chapter that relayed *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*'s tepid reception in London, and followed the discussion of the dramatization of *Birds' Christmas Carol* for amateur performance. The few paragraphs Wiggin gave to *Mother Carey's Chickens* focused positively on the actors and rather negatively on the producer. While *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*'s critical and financial success was shepherded

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<sup>359</sup> Lois Gottlieb, *Rachel Crothers* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 82.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

by the producing giants Klaw and Erlanger, *Mother Carey's Chickens* was produced by John Cort with lackluster results. Without mentioning him by name, Wiggin blamed Cort for the play's lack of success, and noted that "its career was continually hampered by bad financial management and ill-advised bookings."<sup>361</sup> Wiggin further damned Cort's management by acknowledging that she occasionally paid the actors' salaries when "nobody else would or could."<sup>362</sup> Private letters Wiggin wrote during the troubled run of *Mother Carey's Chickens* contained a similarly morose acknowledgement of the play's failure. One such letter, simply addressed to "Albert and Justine," opens with a handwritten note stating "I want you to know that my play will be in Boston Jan. 7. Shubert owner of the Majestic Theatre will evict it of course, at the end of the first week if unsuccessful."<sup>363</sup> The missive goes on to acknowledge in the typed body of the letter that "the railroad congestion and coal shortage having added to the risk of touring, and the play, like most others, having lost money steadily on the road" offering a solemn justification for the play's failure.<sup>364</sup>

The inclusion of this commercial failure in her performance as playwright destabilized Wiggin's cohesive representation in the role as *successful* playwright, but she counters this view by highlighting her noncommercial dramatizations that still upheld her identity performance. Wiggin controlled the image of her identity, using her autobiography to comment obliquely on her experience with the commercial theatre. She noted that "a play once produced can never be out of mind for a day until

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<sup>361</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 412.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, New York City, to Albert and Justine, date unknown [1917-8], From the Maine Women Writers Collection, Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*



it has finished its prosperous journey, or been peacefully interred in the theatrical storehouse.”<sup>365</sup> Yet, Wiggin wistfully observed the capriciousness of commercial viability that allowed a play that had its flaws to be “a perfectly delightful play when the “Standing Room Only” sign decorates the outside of the theater, giving a style and distinction to the sidewalk that no other placard in the world possesses.”<sup>366</sup> Little wonder that Wiggin looked to amateur theatricals to shore up her portrayal of herself as dramatist, for the emphasis in amateur performance moved the indicator of success away from the box office and to the experience of those creating the performance.

**“A play is a quicksilver sort of thing....”<sup>367</sup>**

*The Birds’ Christmas Carol*, first written around 1880 to raise funds for the Silver Street Kindergarten, was one of Wiggin’s earliest successes as a novelist, which was compelling enough reason for her to attempt to adapt the story to the stage. While the dramatization of *The Birds’ Christmas Carol* never culminated in a Broadway production, it nonetheless has an intriguing history. Houghton Mifflin published the playtext by Wiggin and Helen Ingersoll in 1914; however, Wiggin publicly mentioned that she was working on an adaptation of the piece as early as 1902, well before her collaborative relationship with Ingersoll.<sup>368</sup> An article printed that year in the *New York Times* “Saturday Review of Books and Art,” alludes to an early attempt on her part to dramatize the novel, and states that, while “the basis of the play has been submitted by someone else, and been accepted by Mrs. Wiggin,”

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<sup>365</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 414.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>368</sup> Little information about Helen Ingersoll, her relationship with Wiggin, or her career in theatre has survived the era.

she insisted on a simple, sentimental integrity to the work.<sup>369</sup> However, in the same article, she admitted that “there are many things admissible in a book that would be too pathetic for the stage,” perhaps explaining why the venture was shelved until after the success of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.<sup>370</sup> Even as the latter novel made its way to the stage, however, Wiggin was evidently still preoccupied with the theatrical possibilities of *Birds’ Christmas Carol*, in all likelihood referring to that particular story in an interview in 1912 when she said, “I am working out another play and, like Rebecca, the central figure will be a child, but a child surrounded by grown folks, with their own interests and their own appeal to an audience.”<sup>371</sup> The dramatization of the story of Carol Bird was challenging for the professional stage, perhaps due to the number of children’s roles still necessary to the play, or perhaps due to a waning public taste for sentimentality on stage. Eventually Wiggin, with the aid of Ingersoll, structured the dramatization specifically for amateur theatre. This marked a shift in Wiggin’s dramaturgical focus from the act of adaptation to the performance outcome of her work in a community context as a means to create a more coherent performance of self to present to her public.

The focus on amateur performance for *The Birds’ Christmas Carol* is not surprising. The novel had already seen a number of staged readings and elocutionary performances since its initial publication. In the “Author’s Introduction” to the published playtext, Wiggin referred to *Birds’* immediate popularity on the public

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<sup>369</sup> W. De Waggstaffe, “Kate Douglas Wiggin; her personality, ways of work, and some of her books—in New York this winter.” *The New York Times*, 5 April 1902.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Review of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin (unknown theatre, New York), *The New York Sun*, October, 1912. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

speaking circuit: “It was not many months before selections from the book began to appear on the programmes of public readers, and in due course it was given in one form or another by hundreds of academies and seminaries....”<sup>372</sup> Wiggin also noted that “sometimes it appears in tableaux, sometimes in pantomime, with or without explanatory readings; but more often it was ‘acted’ under the direction of some one who arranged the various conversations of the book with due regard to continuity, the loosely connected scenes serving as a modest and rudimentary play.”<sup>373</sup> Wiggin used the premise that the pathetic and overly sentimentalized nature of the “little ‘Carol plays’” that were sent to her by earnest amateur performers and were “so pathological and so painful that the youthful part of any audience would have been in tears” as a justification to adapt the novel herself.<sup>374</sup> This justification allowed her to once again frame her performance as playwright as the responsible caretaker of her stories and characters.

By arguing for more lightheartedness in her own dramatic version, Wiggin not only set up her adaptation as superior to previous versions, but also created an opportunity to build on successful amateur stagings and readings. In *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin noted that the portion of the story referred to as “The Ruggleses’ Dinner Party” “had long been played by amateurs before my own more finished effort appeared in print” and was extremely popular.<sup>375</sup> In fact, the dramatized version of *The Birds’ Christmas Carol* garnered only a few brief paragraphs in Wiggin’s autobiography, and those focus on two amateur performances that pre-date the

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<sup>372</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, Introduction to *The Birds’ Christmas Carol: Dramatic Version*. In collaboration with Helen Ingersoll (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), v.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., v-vi.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>375</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 407.

publication of Wiggin and Ingersoll's dramatic version. One of these was a relatively well-publicized burlesque rendition given at Harvard, featuring "a noted Harvard professor in the role of Mrs. Ruggles;" the other, a performance Wiggin was invited to attend at the Perkins Institute of the Blind.<sup>376</sup> That the only performances of the story of the Ruggles family that Wiggin makes note of are both done by male casts is inexplicable, particularly when she admits to the Ruggleses' having "made their appearance on the amateur stage quite regularly for more than thirty years."<sup>377</sup> It is possible Wiggin specifically invoked the Harvard staging of her work to reinforce her cultural capital as a playwright.

The influence of amateur theatricals in her life may be equally important to the construction of the dramatized version of this piece. Between 1913 and 1916, Constance D'arcy Mackay, renowned for her work in amateur theatre and civic pageantry, was a frequent summer visitor to Quillcote.<sup>378</sup> Mackay's first visit coincided with her production of *Dame Greel o' Portland Town*, the first of two historical pageants she produced for the City of Portland, Maine.<sup>379</sup> Wiggin was well aware of Mackay's work even prior to her pageant work in Maine. During the summer season in 1912, Wiggin and her compatriots staged two of Mackay's plays in the Quillcote barn. The performances are recorded in the Quillcote Guest Book.<sup>380</sup>

As I noted in an earlier chapter, the use of amateur theatricals as entertainment had long been a part of Wiggin's life. Taken in the larger context of at-home

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>377</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, Introduction to *The Birds' Christmas Carol: Dramatic Version*, vi.

<sup>378</sup> For more information on Mackay, see Brook M. Davis's "Constance D'Arcy Mackay : playwright, director, and educator : inspiring women, children, and communities through amateur theatre" (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1999), as well as Mackay's work *The Little Theatre in the United States* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1917).

<sup>379</sup> Constance D'arcy Mackay, *Plays of the Pioneers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1915): 123-137.

<sup>380</sup> Quillcote Guest Book, Courtesy of The Salmon Falls Library and Tea Room, Hollis, Maine.

theatricals and parlor entertainments, performances like the evening of Mackay's plays in the Quillcote barn offered Wiggin another rhetorical construct for self-expression. This construct operated in a well-defined, hierarchical manner that made use of the negotiation between public and private spheres for women at the turn of the twentieth century. As Nan Johnson asserts, parlor (and in this case barn) entertainments provided women an opportunity to affect culture and society from the private sphere, allowing women to escape the threat that "women's claims to rhetorics of power compromise their virtue and the moral health of the nation" while simultaneously reasserting that a woman's "best power lies in their 'quiet' occupation at home."<sup>381</sup> Here, Wiggin makes use of this conservative concept of home and entertainment to shape an act of self-expression that can be read as participating in what Howe refers to as American Victorianism's "cult of domesticity" in which "the home was conceived as an orderly and secure place where children were indoctrinated with the proper values before being sent forth to make their way in the world."<sup>382</sup> However, there were no real children to indoctrinate in Wiggin's private sphere; the imaginary and literary children reigned. This, combined with Wiggin's well-established role in the public sphere, helped create an intrastitial space that functioned as both public and private in which Wiggin could present herself as participating in the conservative feminine construct of private life in a way that benefited her publicly.

Wiggin's amateur barn entertainments were staged both for and with her visitors and neighbors. The plays were not sold as entertainment, but they were

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<sup>381</sup> Nan Johnson, "Reigning in the Court of Silence: Women and Rhetorical Space in Postbellum America," 222-223.

<sup>382</sup> Howe, 515-516.

*marketed* to increase both Wiggin's cultural capital, and by extension, that of the audience and participants. Nora Archibald Smith recounted one of these entertainments in detail: the "Concert and Literary Entertainment given by a celebrated (and wholly fictitious) 'McGibeny Family.'"<sup>383</sup> Like many middle-class rural families of the era, Wiggin and her sister spent much of their leisure time at home entertaining themselves and the family with music, word-play, and other forms of "refined vaudeville," occasionally going so far as to "delude our neighbors into believing that the 'McGibeny Family' was a reality and engaged by my sister at a fabulous price, to give a Musical and Dramatic Evening at Quillcote."<sup>384</sup> Given this context, Wiggin's shift from presenting herself as a professional or commercial playwright to one providing entertainment for the family at home seems natural. She shifted her framing to de-emphasize the "work" of playwriting and focus her role on the private environs.

*The Birds' Christmas Carol* fit neatly within this reconstructed frame. The introduction to the dramatic version of *Birds' Christmas Carol* included a series of suggestions for the amateur player that built not only on the construct of private theatricals at the home, but expanded the private sphere conceptualization into the community, in much the same way that municipal housekeeping developed from the rhetoric of women's work as discussed in an earlier chapter. Wiggin urged amateur players to emphasize their strengths, to "do the best you can, always remembering that if the actors are in the right spirit they will be just so many instruments of suggestion, establishing that wonderful and mysterious collaboration between players

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<sup>383</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 120.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

and audience that is always in force when things are at their best.”<sup>385</sup> By focusing on the actor/audience interaction in a community context, Wiggin positioned herself as a wise counselor who was not only the best person to present this particular story, but one who could offer advice on both private and civic performance, depending on the venue and intent behind the production. Wiggin’s shift from the professional context to the relative privacy of parlor entertainments and amateur performances initially undertaken with *Birds’ Christmas Carol* married with her philanthropic self discussed in the next chapter, with the dramatization of *The Old Peabody Pew*.

**“Our players belonged to the village, and their work was the voicing of the community spirit....”<sup>386</sup>**

Following her work with Helen Ingersoll on the adaptation of *Birds’ Christmas Carol*, Wiggin undertook her first and only dramatic adaptation without the help of a collaborator: *The Old Peabody Pew*. Like *Birds’ Christmas Carol*, this play emphasized amateur theatrical opportunities over the professional, contained a strong commitment to voicing and preserving a sense of community identity that was falling out of fashion. It was written for an audience that valued the rural way of life and its tenets and morals. This play is arguably the best example of community spirit embedded in any of Wiggin’s work and offers a fascinating context for a complex performance of community history and identity that will be explored further in the next chapter.

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<sup>385</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, Introduction to *The Birds’ Christmas Carol: Dramatic Version*, x-xi.

<sup>386</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 410.

The impetus adapting *The Old Peabody Pew* was much the same as that for the publication of the original novel, and marked a transition in how she framed her writing self back toward the philanthropic foundation that first launched her career. This time, however, Wiggin's emphasis had moved from the kindergarten to the community at large. Wiggin was searching for a way to raise funds to undertake municipal and social improvements in the small New England town that had borne her so much creative fruit. Based on the 1907 short novel of the same name, and set in the same country meeting-house whose history provided the foundation for the fictionalized account of its community members, Wiggin wrote a play that not only portrayed the contemporary spirit of the rural community that surrounded her summer home, but also offered a nostalgic version of the community's past without a heightened sense of theatricality to mar the effect. In her autobiography, Wiggin spoke specifically to the "de-theatricalization" of this play, in order to keep the appropriate reverence for the church setting. She wrote, "I determined to make a play of the book...without sacrificing the reverence due to a consecrated building or rousing the least opposition from the most orthodox parishioner. To this end I abolished all thought of stage, scenery, curtain, or theatrical lighting."<sup>387</sup> By making the choice to remove much of the theatrical trimming from this play and emphasize the community-based and community-driven nature of the piece, Wiggin realized early on in the rehearsal process that her amateur actors had to accept the lack of illusion, and strive toward both a simplicity and a veracity in their performance of this slice of a bygone era. At the first rehearsal, Wiggin remembered exhorting her volunteer players that "we cannot hope to produce an illusion, under the

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 409-410.



circumstances, so we will simply try to present a piece of life. Remember, now, not a trace of effort, of artifice, of self-consciousness! There is to be no make-believe about this performance; it is to be the real thing!”<sup>388</sup> This recollection echoes Wiggin’s anxiety about rehearsals that surfaced not only in her early career as a playwright, but throughout her public life.

*The Old Peabody Pew* premiered in the little country meeting-house for which it was written, thereby negating the need for stage, scenery, curtain, and lights. The community response to Wiggin’s representation of them on the stage was extremely positive. Southern Maine newspapers covered the event extensively, bringing the play to the attention of the surrounding communities with articles previewing the performance as well as reviews of the performance. In interviews prior to the debut, Wiggin paid special attention to the community’s fundamental role in the play, stating that “We are giving the entertainment its first trial here because I cannot bear the thought of allowing other country churches to announce *The Old Peabody Pew* until the meeting house at Buxton Lower Corner has led the way.”<sup>389</sup> With *The Old Peabody Pew*, Wiggin created a performance context vastly different from her professional experience with *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*; instead of bringing the rural idyll to the big city, she presented a nostalgic rural image to the community which provided so much inspiration for her work.

Wiggin emphasized the community-based, amateur nature of the original production of *The Old Peabody Pew*, eschewing the use of professional actors in

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>389</sup> “No Stage, Footlights nor Curtain for Presentation of The Old Peabody Pew,” *Portland Evening Express and Advertiser*, 9 August 1916. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

favor of using members of the Dorcas Society (to whom the play was dedicated and who were the fictionalized subject of the piece). In addition, Wiggin adamantly refused to impinge on the hallowed nature of the meeting-house space, eschewing theatrical trappings, and embracing the sanctified structure of the meeting-house “without the touch of the thetricalism [sic] which would be inappropriate to the surroundings.”<sup>390</sup> Wiggin’s success with *The Old Peabody Pew* was measured not by box office returns, but by its ability to appeal to nostalgia for the rural life of a bygone era.

Reviews of the first performance highlight the audience’s anticipation of the event. One reviewer commented that “long before the hour the great stretch of green gleamed with the headlights of touring cars, limousines and all the motor family, appearing for all the world like mammoth fireflies out a-jaunting. People came from here, there and everywhere.”<sup>391</sup> In a photo that accompanies the review, the dirt roads are clogged with the cars of those that traveled from Portland and other cities for the performances, leaving no room for the horse-drawn wagons that ferried local townspeople to the church.<sup>392</sup> Critical response justified this anticipation, noting that “quite touched by the pathos and yet all the while softly smiling in reminiscence of the quaint flashes of humor with which it abounded, the audience left the church deeply impressed by Mrs. Wiggin’s beautiful dramatization....”<sup>393</sup> Another review, after echoing these sentiments, drew attention to the dramatic adaptation and that “the dialogue was brisk and lively, while it carried the aroma of olden and less

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> “Many Local People See Peabody Pew,” *Biddeford Daily Journal* 17 August 1916. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

sophisticated days with unerring skill.”<sup>394</sup> With the dramatization of *The Old Peabody Pew*, Wiggin found the appropriate style and venue for her work, allowing the witty banter that marked her novels to shine.

The nostalgic echo that runs through *The Old Peabody Pew* was perhaps appreciated all the more by this particular audience in this particular setting; in viewing the play, they had the opportunity to blur the lines between their own past and the fictionalized account Wiggin offered. The lines were blurred further by choosing local amateur performers over professional, causing one reviewer to comment “they are not actors and actresses. They are themselves on the stage, as much at home before the audience of fashionable summer folk as in every day converse with their next door neighbor....local folk are cast in the roles in which they appear ‘as to the manner born.’”<sup>395</sup> Wiggin remembered the event as “a miracle of simplicity and directness, and the response on the part of audience after audience was overwhelming in its manifest delight and breathless interest.”<sup>396</sup> Wiggin’s recollection of the performances of *The Old Peabody Pew* crossed boundaries of time for the community, and for Wiggin as well. The event aided her creation of a complete and coherent performance of self by uniting her playmaking and her philanthropic legacy.

Wiggin further united her personae by creating a portion of the dramatized *The Old Peabody Pew* that operated within the construct of public speaking or

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<sup>394</sup> Review of *The Old Peabody Pew* by Kate Douglas Wiggin, unknown newspaper [August 1916]. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>395</sup> “Old Peabody Pew to be Given Again,” *Portland Press* 18 August 1916. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>396</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 410.

platform performance. In her introduction to the play, Wiggin justified this insertion by pointing to the perils of adapting it for non-commercial use:

One of the obvious weaknesses of the play is that, because we were debarred from change of scene and costume, I had to read from the book a carefully arranged prelude to the first act, perhaps five minutes in length, and an interlude of perhaps ten minutes before the second act, to inform the audience concerning the youthful love-story of Justin and Nancy and prepare them for the romantic reunion that was to take place in the church after the supposed lapse of ten years. These readings, brief though they were, ought by rights to have killed any play; but “The Old Peabody Pew” had the resistance of iron or leather.<sup>397</sup>

Wiggin inserted the interludes she mentions above in order to fill in the gaps in the story that happen away from the little church in which the bulk of the action of the play occurs. However, she cautioned those amateurs who would mount the play against overzealous interpretations of these interludes, stating “the play only fails to please when an elocutionist of the aggressive type does the reading and usurps the center of the stage that should belong to the players.”<sup>398</sup> While Wiggin’s goal was to overcome the limitations of a single setting and provide amateurs with the ability to perform the play in whatever modest venue was available, the choice also served as a quintessential opportunity for Wiggin to integrate her roles as public speaker, playwright, and philanthropist.

In the year following its initial performance, *The Old Peabody Pew* was published by Samuel French with an extensive introduction wherein Wiggin outlined specific instructions for amateur organizations wishing to perform the play, as she maintained that it was “written principally for use in old-fashioned churches.”<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 411-412.

<sup>399</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *The Old Peabody Pew: Dramatized by Kate Douglas Wiggin From her Book of the Same Name*, (New York: Samuel French, 1917), 5.

After exhorting would-be performers not to attempt to overly theatricalize their presentations, and suggesting “that there be no really eccentric dressing of the characters” as “the moment that the costuming is overdone the play suffers in consequence,” Wiggin outlined keys to achieving the simplicity of presentation that her play required.

Wiggin’s success with *The Old Peabody Pew* could not be measured against the professional success of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*; to make comparisons between the two plays is fruitless. In her autobiography, Wiggin measured the success of her work on *The Old Peabody Pew* not by its theatrical aesthetic, but rather by the audience’s response to it:

Lack of scenery, of theatrical make-up, of numberless aids of ordinary stage production—their absence apparently made the heart grow fonder, for the audiences laughed more freely and wept more copiously in the afternoon than in the evening performances.<sup>400</sup>

Where the success of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* could be measured in box office receipts and international renown, to Wiggin and her compatriots in The Dorcas Society, *The Old Peabody Pew*’s victory lay in its longevity within the community it represents.

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<sup>400</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 411.



This was a collaborator -  
 You could never match  
   or match her.  
 She was tall and dark  
   and rasy,  
 Stayed so long that - Lord  
   'a' massy!  
 All the worms and cater-  
   pillars

Turned to butterflies and millers,  
 Apples' bark as big as gravel  
 Passed away in pies. "Oh, travel  
 Travel on! How can we make her?"  
 Said the fam'ly. "Can we shake her?"  
 All at once she up and hollered,  
 "Long enough have I been collared!"  
 Took a leap and reached the River -  
 Sailed off on a fruit Oliver!  
 She was mad. They could not check her.  
 On her tombstone write - - - "Rebecca!"

Figure 1. Wiggin's ode to Charlotte Thompson in the Quillcote guestbook.  
 Courtesy of The Salmon Falls Library and Tea Room, Hollis, Maine.

An Evening of Old English Comedy  
in  
Quillcote Barn,  
July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

"The Beau's Christmas" Constance d'Arey Mackay.  
Dean Nash. Dr. F. B. Fenderson.  
His Servant. Miss Peirce.  
The Lady. Mrs Riggs.

"Gretna Green." Constance d'Arey Mackay.  
Aunt Avis. Miss Smith.  
Maria. Miss Sasser.  
Maria's Father. Dr. Fenderson.  
Stage Manager, Mr Clayton Gilbert.  
Asst " " " W. S. Moulton.

Musicians:  
Mrs Williston Hough.  
Miss Evelyn Fogg.  
Miss Frances Dyer.

Figure 2. An evening of entertainment, as recorded in the Quillcote Guestbook.  
Courtesy of The Salmon Falls Library and Tea Room, Hollis, Maine.

## Chapter 5: “We Women Cannot be Content to be Mere Spectators”<sup>401</sup>: Performing Philanthropy and the Continued Legacy of Wiggin’s Autobiographical Acts

While much of Wiggin’s life and work has been marginalized in the twenty-first century, her influence during the height of her career was profound, as has been noted in prior chapters on her roles as educator, public speaker, and playwright. The final chapter of her life focused on her work as philanthropist, which while seen in her significant ties to the Free Kindergarten movement, is most closely associated with her own childhood and home through her establishment of the Dorcas Society of Buxton and Hollis, Maine.

While Wiggin was born in Philadelphia in 1856, the town of Hollis, was, in her own words, where “real life, conscious, coherent, continuous,” began for her.<sup>402</sup> After Wiggin’s rise as an educator, public speaker, and author, she and her family once again returned to Hollis, if only for the summer seasons.<sup>403</sup> In 1893, she purchased an old farm along the banks of her beloved Saco River, named the place Quillcote and, from that point until her death in 1923, did the bulk of her writing at this summer retreat. Many of her books reflect this rural environment in their setting, including *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, in which Wiggin recreated her own

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<sup>401</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, Speech labeled “Philanthropy”, date unknown, Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>402</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 5.

<sup>403</sup> As Wiggin transitioned her career from educator to woman of letters, she spend less and less time overseeing the kindergarten and kindergarten training school in California. With her marriage to George C. Riggs in 1895, Wiggin began dividing her time equally between England, New York, and Hollis, Maine.



adventurous first coach ride to the town as Rebecca's own experience. Most of her writing used this area of Southern Maine as a nostalgic backdrop and an allegorical ideal of both childhood and rural life.

The same year that she purchased Quillcote, she started her philanthropy in and for the town. She recalled: "Returning to Hollis, I did my first piece of civic work in Maine by reading unpublished stories for the minister's salary fund, in the old Tory Hill Meeting House at Buxton Lower Corner, the first of many, perhaps thirty, others of the kind."<sup>404</sup> Through the rest of her life, she would organize and finance many philanthropic endeavors in the Buxton/Hollis community. Wiggin started the first lending library in the area (which is still operational), established a summer kindergarten school, petitioned the Village Improvement Association for road enhancement, and spoke out against the damming of the Saco River in an area that would flood a Native American archeological site. Despite the fact that Wiggin was not a full-time resident of the area, her interest and influence were clearly felt—not only in her time, but even today.

In this chapter, I argue that Wiggin capitalized upon the strength of progressive social movements like municipal housekeeping and the proliferation of grass roots organizations at the height of the women's club movement to create a complete and coherent presentation of self. This self-presentation depended on the formation of and participation in the Dorcas Society. Wiggin was able to create a version of herself that served her legacy, and that has maintained a degree of stability years after her death. Finally, it is this legacy that is still asserted through the Dorcas Society's continued presence in southern Maine, as members of the organization

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 256.

incorporate Wiggin's life, work, and the community's history to reinforce their shared culture and experience at key performative events throughout the year.

Perhaps Caroline Severance's influence could still be felt through Wiggin's selection of which movements and organizations she supported. While Wiggin's own views on reform were much more conservative than those of Severance, Severance's advocacy of municipal housekeeping and of the "city beautiful" campaigns greatly influenced Wiggin's social advocacy.<sup>405</sup> Wiggin not only supported these kinds of endeavors during the seasons in which she lived in New York, but also the municipal work at her summer home in Hollis, Maine. While initially Wiggin's social and charitable work in Hollis was undertaken through already established organizations, she quickly saw an opportunity to help the community by capitalizing on her own public persona.

Along with like-minded residents of the area, Wiggin organized the Dorcas Society of Hollis and Buxton, Maine, named after the biblical figure whose "good deeds and alms work" served as their model.<sup>406</sup> The mission of the Dorcas Society, according to the original constitution and by-laws, was "the encouragement and carrying on of literary, musical, charitable, social, religious and benevolent work in the towns of Hollis and Buxton."<sup>407</sup> Wiggin explained the impetus for the organization, with its wide-ranging agenda for community betterment:

We began by helping the historic old Orthodox Church on Tory Hill in Buxton. Although we began on the church as the center of the neighborhood's

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<sup>405</sup> Speech manuscript. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>406</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *The Old Peabody Pew*. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), vi. Dorcas appears in Acts 9:34-43 in the Bible, and the description of her charitable work varies with translation.

<sup>407</sup> Constitution and By-Laws of the Dorcas Society, 1897. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

intellectual and social life, as well as its spiritual center, after we had renovated the parsonage within and without, we extended the sphere of our activities to include many departments of village work, such as buying certain educational luxuries for the district schools, giving donations toward various neighborhood improvements and pledging a substantial annual subscription to the minister's salary.<sup>408</sup>

For Wiggin, the identity of the town was tied to the “intellectual and social life” of the community. However, by specifically including educational donations as one of the formative tasks of the Dorcas Society, she highlighted her past performance of self as an educator and privileged educational philanthropy among the good deeds undertaken by the group.

Wiggin was particularly proud of the work the Dorcas Society did in the community, stating: “I have worked with various organizations both here and abroad, and I never saw anything more admirable than the unselfish labor, the energy, pluck, spirit, and skill that were developed in our membership as the work grew and demanded greater effort.”<sup>409</sup> Her philanthropic work with the Dorcas Society was work that brought her closest to a sense of home, and gave her an opportunity to identify with the “energy, pluck, and spirit” that she had embodied in her youth. By returning as an adult, and forging links to who she had been as a child in the community, she came full circle in her identity formation, and the biblical Dorcas became a model for Wiggin's self-representation as she sought to fill the end of her years with good works and deeds.

Beyond the standard twenty-five cent subscription fees paid annually by its members to the organization, Wiggin established three major forms of fundraising for the Dorcas Society that served as opportunities for impression management. These

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<sup>408</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 386.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

were the Annual Dorcas Fair and Garden Party, the performance of Wiggin's play adaptation of *The Old Peabody Pew*, and the publication of *Dorcas Dishes*. All three of these fundraising events represented Wiggin as the benevolent philanthropist, but also continue to operate as a means of uniting the community. What makes the Dorcas Society particularly unique, and particularly fascinating to Wiggin scholarship, is its continuity—not merely in its continued existence, but in the manner in which it continues to function. All three types of fundraising, in various forms, remain the foundation of the organization's philanthropy today.

While this charitable women's organization was founded during the height of American women's literary clubs and groups devoted to municipal housekeeping, giving women a voice on issues of education, welfare, and labor reform, one of the unique factors of the Dorcas Society is simply that *it continues to exist*. Most of the women's organizations in America akin to the Dorcas Society reached their peak during or shortly after World War I and began to decline and disappear with the advent of women's right to vote in 1920, their entry into the labor force in larger numbers, and the New Deal politics that sought to institutionalize much of the reform work the women's organizations were undertaking.<sup>410</sup> When women began to see the political means to conduct the social work that formed many of the clubs' fundamental endeavors, their interest in many of the smaller, localized philanthropic women's groups like the Dorcas Society slowly dissolved.

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<sup>410</sup> See Robyn Muncy's *Creating Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935*, (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Anne Ruggles Gere's *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), and Pricilla Murolo's *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

**“The Event Toward Which the Whole Creation Moves”: Wiggin and the Dorcas Society’s Annual Fair and Garden Party<sup>411</sup>**

At the end of her life, as she shaped her legacy as author, educator, performer, and philanthropist through her autobiography, Wiggin went to great lengths to ensure that she left a vivid description of the Dorcas Society’s performance in the community. Clifford Geertz’s use of thick description as outlined in his seminal work, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, serves as a fruitful methodology for analyzing and interpreting the symbols of culture embedded within Wiggin’s narrative.<sup>412</sup>

Wiggin’s description establishes the Dorcas Fair not only as an event, but as a social identification marker as well. The Dorcas Fair, originally held at Quillcote, provided the women of the area an opportunity to raise funds for the community by selling jellies and baked goods, aprons and handy-work, books by the famous local author, and by providing musical and literary entertainment in the barn Wiggin had fitted with a small stage. In order to construct a comparative analysis of the Dorcas Fair as it was created during Wiggin’s time and how the current members of the Dorcas Society interpret the event, it is necessary to quote Wiggin’s description of the Fair here at length.

She wrote:

Quillcote...is neither splendid nor spacious; it is simply a big, white, century-old mansion, well situated for an outdoor festivity. There are magnificent elm trees, wide lawns in front, orchards at the sides, and a beautiful field of eight

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<sup>411</sup>Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 386.

<sup>412</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books), 3-30. Geertz defined culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.” (89)

or nine acres stretching back and up to a fringe of pines. My sister superintends the arrangement of booths and all outside decoration, and makes everything “tone in” with the landscape; so the public is barred out by long garlands of yellow and green looped and rosetted between the elms, while the tall entrance-gates are of goldenrod and hemlock. The booths are all of yellow-and-green striped awning cloth, and the ropes that hold them in place are entwined with goldenrod. Time was when all the articles for sale were displayed within doors, but nowadays the fifteen rooms of the house, and the sheds and the barns, are always so full of visitors during the Fair that the full assortment of our wares cannot be shown properly. Do not suppose that any advantage is taken by the crowd from the fact that the house is open to all—a reception committee doing the honors—for at the end of the day we never find a pin misplaced. There is nothing rare, nothing expensive to be seen, but the rooms furnish rather pleasing object lessons to some of the tired women visitors whose lives have been passed in lonely farmhouses half a mile from the post-office or from any neighbor.<sup>413</sup>

Inexpensive fancy articles are sold in the blue parlor, and jellies, jams, dish-towels and hand-towels, etc., in the dining-room. The study is given up to souvenirs, posters, and photographs, with all sorts of reminders of the literary work of members of the household, and in the old-fashioned rag-carpeted sitting-room are dolls and children’s toys. In the orchard we have booths for the sale of ice-cream, aprons of all kinds, and autographed books; also there is one marvelous apple tree hung with hundreds of five-cent and ten-cent packages wrapped with bright-colored tissue paper. These mysterious “fruits” are removed from the tree by the children with the aid of a long, hooked pole.

The Dorcas aprons, we may as well confess, are our pride and joy, although our prices are so reasonable that we really get little for our labor. Everything practical that can be made of gingham is there, and everything dainty that can be fashioned from white or colored nainsook, muslin, lawn, or organdy is in our stock. The good old “apron habit” is not yet entirely out of fashion in Maine. So many housewives do their work without help that kitchen aprons are a necessity, and our pretty saleswomen are not blind to the effect of a coquettish afternoon apron when they try it upon a casual masculine beholder. There was never an article of woman’s attire more expressive than the apron, and it is a thousand pities that there is no room for it in city life....

As to ways of entertainment at the Fairs, we are not without them. Our Barn seats one hundred and twenty-five—on compulsion—and we give continuous ten-cent concerts, admitting each audience through the front door and dismissing them by way of the back door after fifteen or twenty minutes of

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<sup>413</sup> The first several paragraphs of this chapter are modeled after Clifford Geertz’s use of thick description in as seen in “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” in *The Interpretation of Culture*.

charming music and brief recitations, furnished sometimes by artists from New York or Boston.

At intervals eight of the junior Dorcas members give Morris or Maypole dances on the greensward, fan and parasol reels and old-fashioned “contra dances,” wearing picturesque costumes suited to the period, the music being furnished by a band from the nearest large town, which entertains the crowd by playing every quarter of an hour.

Each season must have its novelties. One year, for instance, we had a four-page newspaper, some folk-dances by a dozen charming girls, and a Registry Booth where persons from twenty-two different States signed their names and paid two cents apiece for the pleasure; we also had a Dorcas Cook Book neatly printed and prettily bound in Delft-blue boards, with a yellow Colonial back. We try, indeed, to have something new in every department to pique the attention and hold the interest of old friends who make annual pilgrimages to the Fair. So much for “ingenuity.”

As for “energy,” perhaps you can imagine the labor involved in giving a festival of this kind in a tiny village a mile from a railway, a village where nearly all the women do their own household work; perhaps you can imagine, I say, the brains and pluck and devotion to the good of the community needed to call this great crowd together and win its approval. We have our ideals in this direction, a sort of flexible Dorcas creed built out of our clientage, our experience, and the purposes we have in view: no lotteries nor raffles; no exorbitant prices; no keeping of “the change”; no pursuit of customers; and no solicitations to purchase.

The Dorcas members, who wear washable dresses, long white aprons, and Priscilla mob-caps, do all the selling, always remembering that they are serving country neighbors or city guests who have come a long distance to aid the cause.

Comparatively little money is earned from all this outlay of time and strength; partly because we are too far from the cities to take care of the even larger crowds we might find means to attract, partly because the village is literally too small to hold the Fair, and partly because we cater chiefly to people of modest means. We don’t mind very much! We have a thousand good ways for spending money, but, after all, we are glad and grateful to make a holiday for the whole countryside. The old-fashioned “Training Day” and “Muster” are no more, but the Dorcas Society can bring as many people together, in as picturesque a setting, as did any of those ancient festivals.”<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 385-391.

Wiggin's thick description of the Fair provides a sense of environment necessary to setting the stage for her performance of self-as-philanthropist at the end of her life. Until her death, the Dorcas Fair was held annually on the grounds of her summer home, which both gave her a sense of proprietorship over the event and framed it within her personal sphere of influence. Yet even in this private setting, Wiggin drew boundaries to confine the experience of the fairgoers, to frame the event and to frame their reception of her persona performance. Wiggin acknowledged that "the public is barred out by long garlands...between the elms" which forced patrons to use "the tall entrance gates" erected for the Fair.<sup>415</sup> Wiggin manipulated the fairgoers' experience by erecting these barriers, and further managed the impression the patrons garnered of her, her home, and the Dorcas Society by furnishing the rooms of her house with "rather pleasing object lessons" for "the tired women visitors whose lives have been passed in lonely farmhouses."<sup>416</sup> These object lessons of simple household tasks meant to symbolize a nurturing and productive environment and staged in Wiggin's home, served to hold Wiggin and her presentation of self as an exemplar for the community. This reaffirmed Wiggin's performance of middle-class respectability and the trope of femininity in which it participated.

Within this studiously engineered environment, Wiggin integrated her roles of educator, author, performer, and philanthropist. Wiggin made note of the sitting room, with its "dolls and children's toys," and the "fruits" hung from the apple tree as treats for the children.<sup>417</sup> Both references reinforced her connection to early childhood education and her role as educator. In addition, Wiggin referenced her

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<sup>415</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 387.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 388.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.



characterization as author by pointing to “the reminders of the literary work of members of the household” that were strewn strategically around the study and offered for sale at the booths.<sup>418</sup> Furthermore, Wiggin alluded to her various roles that were associated with entertainment and performance by including the variety of entertainments held at the Fair. Most of these entertainments were more musical than theatrical, linking them back to her youthful performative expressions, in much the same manner that the return to Hollis connected her adult personae with her childhood. However, Wiggin also included the “brief recitations” as part of the continuous barn concerts that reference her identity as elocutionist.<sup>419</sup> Wiggin placed particular emphasis on the novelty of the entertainment, assuring her readers that “we try, indeed, to have something new in every department to pique the attention and hold the interest” of the fairgoers.<sup>420</sup>

Finally, however, through her performance as philanthropist, Wiggin facilely forged a connection between herself as hostess at Quillcote and as municipal housekeeper, hosting the Dorcas Fair as a means to community betterment. Indeed, from the jellies and jams to the coquettish afternoon aprons, the image and personification of the Dorcas women and their good deeds and alms work permeated Wiggin’s description. Simultaneously, the account served to reinforce the performance of middle-class feminine respectability so vital to the identity formation of the female philanthropists involved in the organization.

The definition of this feminine respectability for the Dorcas Fair is embedded in Wiggin’s description of the women’s costumes for the event. Wiggin noted that the

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 390-391.

Dorcas members “wear washable dresses, long white aprons, and Priscilla mob-caps” that hearken back to the era of Republican Motherhood that informed the resurgence of the cult of true womanhood out of which municipal housekeeping sprung.<sup>421</sup> The costumes represented a nostalgic yearning for the rural ideal of the past that was prominent in New England at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>422</sup> Specifically, Wiggin’s romanticization of the “good old ‘apron habit’” stands as a marker of femininity that strove to connect the modest homemakers of the past to the municipal housekeepers of Wiggin’s present.<sup>423</sup> Wiggin labeled the aprons “our pride and joy,” endowing the articles with import in the lives of the Dorcas women due to both their practicality and their “coquettish” effect on the “casual masculine beholder.”<sup>424</sup> As a costume piece, the apron served to indicate the energy and industry all of the Dorcas women brought to their philanthropic work, and the “pluck and devotion to the good of the community needed to call this great crowd together and win its approval.”<sup>425</sup>

The success of the Dorcas Fair during Wiggin’s lifetime as both a fundraising event and as an opportunity to manage her acts of self-representation were measurable in numerous newspaper articles about the Fair through the years. A 1905 notice in the *Portland Daily Advertiser* noted that “the pleasant entertainment furnished by the members of the Dorcas society made the affair one of the most enjoyable social events of the season in this vicinity” and that Wiggin herself “was

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>422</sup> For more information on the rural ideal and the Country Life Movement, please see Hal S. Barron’s *Those who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>423</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 388.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 391.

hostess and an important factor in the social success of the day.”<sup>426</sup> This account of the Fair illustrates the reciprocity involved in the impression management undertaken by Wiggin, and that of the Dorcas Society as a whole. In most of the published data regarding the Fair and the Dorcas Society more generally, the group is so closely identified with Wiggin and Wiggin’s persona that they eventually become interchangeable. Another chronicle of the Fair from 1909 observed:

Surely her charm must be great to draw year after year, a decade nearly, these visitors to her side who come just to do her homage. She, with her sister and mother, all so alike are, without doubt, the most widely known and beloved hostesses in Maine, and the beautiful old house called Quillcote, is a fitting shrine.<sup>427</sup>

Again, there was no distinction between Wiggin and the Dorcas Society, between her individual philanthropy and that of the group. Yet she was certainly no mere figurehead. Wiggin actively participated in the mounting of the Fair. One report recalled that “Mrs. Wiggin was here, there and everywhere, greeting old friends, autographing her own books, for which the demand soon exceeded the supply, directing the concerts in the quaint barn and doing a thousand and one pretty things that went forward toward the success of the day.”<sup>428</sup> As noted previously, Wiggin would also occasionally read from her own work at the Fair, and one notice from 1912 announced that performance as “the greatest treat of all...which came as a delightful surprise.”<sup>429</sup> Wiggin worked arduously to ensure that while her name and persona brought the public through the gates of the Dorcas Fair, the work of the

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<sup>426</sup> *Portland Daily Advertiser*, 26 August 1908. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>427</sup> *Portland Daily Press*, 6 August 1909. Kate Douglas Wiggin Collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine..

<sup>428</sup> Newspaper unknown, 12 August 1910. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>429</sup> Newspaper unknown, 31 August 1912. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

whole organization received its rightful attention. While notices of the Fair in the year following her death included brief mention of Wiggin as “the beloved honorary president,” the focus fell upon the entertainment and the articles for sale, and how both recall an early era.<sup>430</sup> Within a short span of time, Wiggin’s presence became unnecessary to the performance of philanthropy at the Dorcas Fair; however, her absence created opportunities for the women’s organization to create acts of self expression that used her identity as another link to a nostalgic past.

**“A Good Imitation of a Dorcas Society Meeting”: *The Old Peabody Pew* as a Philanthropic Endeavor<sup>431</sup>**

The second of Wiggin’s philanthropic ideas for the Dorcas Society was the play adaptation of *The Old Peabody Pew* discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. In this chapter, the focus is not the dramaturgy of the play, but the impetus to create first the novel and then the adaptation as vehicles for the Dorcas Society’s philanthropy, and the longevity of the play within the Hollis community alluded to in the previous chapter. While *The Old Peabody Pew* was originally performed at the Fair, its holiday setting (and the heavy wool costumes used to establish the chill of a Maine winter), inspired the Dorcas members to move the play’s performance to the first Saturday of December. Its meaning to the local community, however, has not changed in the hundred plus years since its first performance. As one local man and play participant stated in 1982, “*The Old Peabody Pew* reflects life in rural Maine at

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<sup>430</sup> *Portland Evening Express*, [1924]. Kate Douglas Wiggin Collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, Josephine S. Abplanalp Library, University of New England, Portland Maine.

<sup>431</sup> Wiggin, *The Old Peabody Pew: Dramatized by Kate Douglas Wiggin: From her Book of the Same Title*, 17.

the turn of the century. Nostalgic in every detail, its simple message is noteworthy for those who try to seek happiness in riches....Although the theme is hardly unique, the flavor of the Maine character captures the idea so poignantly that it almost becomes original.”<sup>432</sup> This flavor of Maine is the essence which Dorcas members seek to recuperate.

The novel, which was dedicated to the “handful of dear New England women of names unknown to the world, dwelling in a certain quiet village, alike unknown,” was created as a tribute to of the Dorcas Society, with a love story crafted for the plot. While the romantic couple is “pure fiction,” the impetus for the story did spring from a Dorcas Meeting at the Tory Hill Meeting House where, after spending an “exhilarating October morning” of scrubbing pews at the church, Wiggin sat waiting for her ride and “all at once the story took shape” in her mind.<sup>433</sup> While “the Dorcas members made a background” for the love story between Nancy Wentworth and Justin Peabody, the central character was the charitable work undertaken by the industrious women. More than the business documents preserved by the Dorcas Society, *The Old Peabody Pew* outlined the mission of the Dorcas women, detailing the enterprises they would undertake as part of their charitable work, which, in the instance of this particular novel and play, included such things as re-carpeting the Tory Hill Meeting House. Wiggin stated that “every sort of honest machinery for the increase of funds had been set in motion: harvest suppers, pie sociables, old folks’ concerts, apron sales, and at last resort, a subscription paper” by her fictionalized

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<sup>432</sup> Jack C. Barnes, “Kate Douglas Wiggin and *The Old Peabody Pew*,” *BitterSweet: A Magazine of Western Maine Perspective*. (August 1982), 13.

<sup>433</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 408.

Dorcas Society.<sup>434</sup> However, all of these events were also staged by the real Dorcas Society as fundraising measures to complete their philanthropic mission within the community. In essence, *The Old Peabody Pew* is about the Dorcas Society and its members' good works, although Wiggin insisted that the women of her story are completely fictionalized.

The book carries a lengthy dedication to the Dorcas women, acknowledging that "there really is a Dorcas Society, as you and I well know, and one not unlike that in these pages; and you and I have lived through many discouraging, laughable, and beautiful experiences while we emulated the Bible Dorcas, that woman 'full of good works and alms deeds.'"<sup>435</sup> While Wiggin's dedication does not appear in the dramatic text, the adaptation itself served as both a dedication, and a multi-layered performance of self. On one level, the act of adaptation functioned as a framing of herself as both playwright, as discussed in the previous chapter, and as philanthropist, giving of her time and talent to benefit the Dorcas Society and the larger community. However, the play also functions as an identity performance of the group of women it represents, including Wiggin, and the organization's philanthropy is both managed by this framing and re-affirmed.

Whether Wiggin meant to model most of the characters in *The Old Peabody Pew* after local women or not, one character that appeared beginning with the ninth performance of *The Old Peabody Pew* was specifically written for a young girl from Hollis, which tied the play irrevocably to the town, its history, and its inhabitants. The small role of Sally Bixby was written specifically for Wiggin's goddaughter,

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<sup>434</sup> Wiggin, *The Old Peabody Pew*. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 17.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., vi.

Kate Douglas Mason.<sup>436</sup> This role, and its inclusion in all subsequent performances in the Tory Hill Meeting House, is dynamically specific to the townspeople and its environs—and was never included in the acting edition of the play, originally published by Samuel French in 1917.<sup>437</sup> Indeed, Sally Bixby has become a unique generational link within the Dorcas Society, while reflecting the deep roots many of the local families have to the area. Kate Douglas Mason, the first to play Sally Bixby, was followed in the role by three generations of her family.<sup>438</sup> Barbara Anderson, Kate Douglas Mason’s daughter, still lives in Hollis, and “inherited” the role upon her mother’s death—literally. The text in which the character of Sally Bixby appears was never published with the rest of the playscript, and was presented as a gift from Wiggin to Mason. Anderson holds the rights to the text of Sally Bixby, and while she never played the part herself, her sister, daughter, and granddaughters have all taken their turns as the character. Sally Bixby has become a tangible link between the Dorcas Society’s past and its present that is specific to Wiggin, the town, and the families that continue to live there.

Other roles have been portrayed by the same Dorcas members for as much as twenty-five or thirty years; often, parts are only recast when a Dorcas member is no longer able to perform the role. A. L. T. Cummings, an “honorary Dorcas” (because the entire membership was female), originated the role of Justin Peabody in 1916,

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<sup>436</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, *Kate Douglas Wiggin, as Her Sister Knew Her*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 301.

<sup>437</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *The Old Peabody Pew: Dramatized by Kate Douglas Wiggin: From Her Book of the Same Title*, (New York: Samuel French, 1917).

<sup>438</sup> Joyce Turrell, “Inheriting a Place in ‘Peabody Pew,’” *The Journal Tribune Calendar* [Portland, ME] 29 November 1990, 3. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

“and twenty-two times after that.”<sup>439</sup> After Cummings stepped down from the role, the romantic couple around which the play’s plot centers was played by various married couples for many years. Intriguingly Olive Hannaford, a local historian and author of *Recollections of Old Buxton, Maine* and *A History of Hollis, Maine* played Nancy Wentworth for a number of years, with her husband cast as her love interest.<sup>440</sup> Hannaford’s son and daughter-in-law also played the role, marking to a certain degree another generational inheritance of parts.<sup>441</sup> Lynn Cummings and Timothy Cook, who have been playing the lovers since 1995, were married when they took over the parts but have continued to play the roles since they divorced in 2005, both feeling, as Cook put it to one reporter, that the play “is bigger than us.”<sup>442</sup> For Cummings and Cook, as for many of the Dorcas members and participants, *The Old Peabody Pew* serves a higher altruistic purpose than any individual can merit.

### **“The Daily Diet of a Band of Country Dorcases”: Performing Philanthropy in the Kitchen<sup>443</sup>**

The third philanthropic offering Wiggin used was a cookbook produced by the women of the society. Named *Dorcas Dishes: A Little Book of Country Cooking*, it

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<sup>439</sup> Performance Review, *Portland Evening Express and Advertiser* [1916]; Jack C. Barnes, “Kate Douglas Wiggin and *The Old Peabody Pew*,” *Bittersweet* (August, 1982), 13. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>440</sup> Alice B. Cousens and Olive W. Hannford, *Recollections of Old Buxton, Maine* (Farmington, ME: The Knowlton and McLeary Company, 1972); *A History of Hollis, Maine* (Farmington, ME: The Knowlton and McLeary Company, 1976).

<sup>441</sup> “Inheriting a Place in ‘Peabody Pew,’” *Maine Journal Tribune* 23 November 1990. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

<sup>442</sup> Robert Lowell, “‘Peabody Pew’ a Buxton Holiday Tradition,” *American Journal* (30 November 2006).

<sup>443</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, ed. *Dorcas Dishes: A Little Book of Country Cooking*, (Hollis, ME: Kate Douglas Wiggin, 1911), 10.



was compiled in 1911 and sold for the first time at that year's Dorcas Fair.<sup>444</sup> While the recipes come from women and families throughout Hollis and Buxton, and were presented as "very simple dishes; just the plain, daily diet of a band of country Dorcasses," they in turn framed Wiggin and the women involved in the production of this book.<sup>445</sup> The cookbook combined Wiggin's literary self and her philanthropic self, while reinforcing an ideal of rural femininity at the same time.

Wiggin used her fame as an author to the advantage of the Dorcas Society by penning the introduction to *Dorcas Dishes*, and while she does not claim authorship of the recipes, (all credited to the various women who contributed them), the front cover boldly reads "Introduction by Kate Douglas Wiggin" where an author's name would normally appear and lists her as the editor on the title page.<sup>446</sup> However, Wiggin rarely asserted her individual identity performance in this text in the way she had through most of the discussion in my work; rather, she wrote in first person, *plural*, framing her performance of self within the group of women involved in the Dorcas Society. By representing herself and the group simultaneously, Wiggin placed herself not only within the frame of small-town philanthropy but also within the role of municipal housekeeper explained earlier. Wiggin emphasized this role in the text of the cookbook immediately prior to the introduction by including selections from Proverbs 31, which she labeled "The Praise and Properties of a Good Wife."<sup>447</sup> Wiggin emphasized those passages that used food in the proverbs, but with her choice of verses, Wiggin also reinforced a performance of femininity that emphasized a

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Proverbs 31:10-29.

mother's virtue and sacrifices for the good of the family. Wiggin created an object lesson for her readership and the community, praising the good wife who "stretcheth out her hand to the poor," and who "looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."<sup>448</sup> Wiggin created a space within the identity of a good wife for herself, and for the Dorcas women, suggesting them as exemplars.<sup>449</sup> However, by completing the selection with the praise "many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all," and using "thou" as the personal pronoun, Wiggin created space for any woman who chose to purchase and use the cookbook to identify as a good wife.

Wiggin downplayed her own individuality throughout this text, putting the emphasis on the group and the group's work. Wiggin's normal writing style favored an active positioning of her self and identity in the forefront of her work, and she often took a first person, authorial stance. There are only two instances in which she referred to herself in the first person within the Introduction to *Dorcas Dishes*, however. In one of these instances, she hearkened back to her youth and the bounty of the garden, where "there were always a few black and red currant bushes...with blackberries, raspberries, or strawberries."<sup>450</sup> While this recollection did not serve Wiggin's framing of the overarching philanthropic mission of the cookbook, it did serve her as a way to connect her identity within the community as a youth to her adult presence there as a benevolent philanthropist. By hearkening back to her youth, she reminded her readers that while she might only reside in Hollis for a few months a year, it was still her home.

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<sup>448</sup> *Dorcas Dishes*, 4.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid, 7.

In the other instance of individual identification in the text, Wiggin wrote, “my private opinion is that we need cooks much more than books,” a statement that can be read in either of two ways. First, her commentary could be an admonition that women should learn the skills of cooking and homemaking rather than read about them.<sup>451</sup> The other interpretation, however, looks beyond the way Wiggin situated the cookbook in the context of womanly virtues as a general subject, and looks more specifically at how she managed the impression of her own identity in this moment. Here, she problematized her own framing of her life by privileging the creation of a meal over the creation of a text. By stating that cooks are more necessary than books, and by not specifically referencing cookbooks, Wiggin downplays her position as author, and makes herself a curator of domestic culture while simultaneously capitalizing on that position to support the causes of the Dorcas Society.

Wiggin’s progression begins with the women taking “honest pride in our little book, as we do in all our endeavors, large or small”; by pointing to little books and small endeavors, Wiggin still created a space for women’s work to be valued.<sup>452</sup> Wiggin advanced her rhetoric beyond the household chores, these endeavors that occurred in the home, to argue that “in church, school, garden, and in farm work, we women are as much needed as in the home, and we shall never be able to make our villages pleasant and prosperous places to live in, nor provide the proper environment for the younger generation unless we apply ourselves earnestly and intelligently to the task.”<sup>453</sup> Wiggin’s introduction implied a natural progression in the women’s work from the home to the community, and provided justification for that movement by

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

exhorting women to the ideal: “every housekeeper who can be...energetic without being a ‘bustler,’ a good cook without being too extravagant, hospitable, yet keeping strength for her own family,—such a woman is as much an inspiration to the community as she is to her own household.”<sup>454</sup> The energetic housekeeper in Wiggin’s introduction could readily apply her skills to the municipal housekeeping of the progressive movement, not by any claims to “startling originality” in the recipes that comprised the cookbook, but through the model they provided to the community of “the value of good housekeeping and good cookery, which indeed are real civic virtues.”<sup>455</sup> Again, women’s responsibility to the betterment of the community was framed by their position in the private sphere; the virtues they exhibited and modeled at home were also meant to be applied to the entire village.

Wiggin openly stated the purpose of the cookbook when she wrote that “it has been compiled because we have many enterprises in hand for which we need money.”<sup>456</sup> This positioned Wiggin and the Dorcas women as providing for their community with much more than the recipes and virtuous kitchen advice contained in the cookbook. Their agenda was evident:

Our Dorcas Society has held many unspoken ideals....We want our little group of villages on the brink of the river to hold up their heads and wax strong. We want our district schools to improve from year to year; our buildings to renew their paint and shingles; our farms to thrive; our Village Improvement societies to prosper; our churches to grow; our roads to be bettered; our new Library to be an influence in its modest way.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

The sale of the cookbook represented the potential of additional opportunities to perform philanthropy in the towns so that the citizens could “hold up their heads” and share in a pride of community identity.

The drive to collect funds to disperse to the community and create improvements in the region compels Dorcas Society members to creative avenues of fundraising that continue to build upon the enterprises initiated in Wiggin’s time. Current members feel that “Wiggin’s philanthropic vision and spirit lives on” through their charitable work, and they have created connections to philanthropic endeavors of the past, like *The Dorcas Dishes*, in ways that link the organization’s history, Wiggin’s life, and their current milieu. On a rainy day in the fall of 2003, several members of the group gathered socially and went to the movies. The movie they chose to see was based on the true story of The Rylstone Women's Institute in England, and how they re-imagined one of their traditional charity fundraisers in an unconventional way. The movie, starring Helen Mirren, was *Calendar Girls*.<sup>458</sup> When one of the women jokingly suggested that the Dorcas members consider creating their own calendar in keeping with that of the ladies of The Rylstone Women’s Institute, most of the others laughed at the idea. However, the seed was planted, and with the aid of local professional photographer Claudia Murray, the Dorcas Society published an 18-month desk calendar for 2005-2006.<sup>459</sup> The women named the calendar “A Little Book of Dorcas Dishes,” as a tongue-in-cheek homage to their predecessors’ philanthropic cookbook, and features members of the Dorcas Society strategically posed in various states of undress.

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<sup>458</sup> *Calendar Girls*, prod. Nick Barton, dir. Nigel Cole, 108 min., 2003.

<sup>459</sup> *A Little Book of Dorcas Dishes: 2005-2006 18-Month Calendar* (Hollis and Buxton, ME: The Dorcas Society, 2005).

The calendar is uniquely situated within the performance of philanthropy that serves as the cornerstone for the self-referential rendering of the women's group. In form, it echoes the contemporary context of the book upon which *Calendar Girls* is based.<sup>460</sup> Yet its title connects it directly to the cookbook and the philanthropy undertaken by the earlier Dorcas members, and through these markers links to a past history infused with a specific cultural content. Furthermore, that cultural content and its historicity receive an encore performance throughout the calendar; all of the photographs, save the one taken at the Tory Hill Parish House which houses the Dorcas Society meetings, were taken at Quillcote. Each photo is rendered in sepia tones, to further connect the contemporary *Dorcas Dishes* to the past. Within each photograph is an embedded marker of how the Dorcas Society continues to perform a portion of its collective identity through Wiggin's own construction of identity: tucked in the background in every image is a photograph of Wiggin. The Dorcas women specifically framed these images to include tangible and intangible connections to Wiggin and the past work of the Dorcas Society.

One of the more concrete connections comes in the form of monthly quotations taken from Wiggin's fiction and chosen specifically for placement in the calendar that "refer to the *current* fund raising efforts of the Society" (emphasis added).<sup>461</sup> These quotations, leading with one from the *Dorcas Dishes* cookbook, link the current philanthropic activities to the past while simultaneously linking the philosophy of the past's philanthropic performance to the present group of women involved in the organization. This linkage carries the traditional ideals of municipal

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<sup>460</sup> Tricia Stewart, *Calendar Girl: In Which a Lady of Rylstone Reveals All*, (New York: Overlook Press, 2003).

<sup>461</sup> *A Little Book of Dorcas Dishes: 2005-2006 18-Month Calendar*.

housekeeping into the twenty-first century by celebrating the simple, fundamental tasks of “sewing, gardening, quilting, polishing silver, making wreaths and candy, preserving and baking, as well as rehearsing,” that happen behind the scenes, in the private sphere, in order to accomplish the public events that form the philanthropic performance.<sup>462</sup>

The calendar’s popularity led to a second printing of the original, which was picked up for distribution by The Vermont Country Store, a catalog and online merchant that specializes in being “purveyors of the practical and hard-to-find.”<sup>463</sup> Indeed, the calendar was such a successful fundraiser for the group that another edition is in the works for 2009, and will be offered for sale through the Dorcas Society’s website and at the annual performance of *The Old Peabody Pew* this December. The addition of the calendar helps secure the throughline of representation of the Dorcas Society that, tinged with twenty-first century markers, has in part led to the continued existence of the group.

**“We Little Suspected That We Were Going to be a Habit”: The Community, Wiggin, and Acts of Self-Expression in the Twenty-First Century<sup>464</sup>**

As I have for the last four years, perhaps five now, I helped my stepmother, Barbara, run the baked goods booth at the Fair. From 9:30 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon, we sell donuts, muffins, pies, cakes, fudge, jams and other goodies to fairgoers. Each year, something different is a big seller: the pies were whisked away in the early hours of this hot, sunny day. The old

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> <http://www.vermontcountrystore.com>.

<sup>464</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 387.

ladies gobbled up the lemon meringue—one had actually pre-ordered hers—and the blueberry, strawberry rhubarb, and hot apple pie went pretty quickly. I have to admit, the fresh cherry pie only landed on the table for about two minutes: my father had the misfortune to show up at the same time the pie did, so I cajoled him into buying it for me.

While all the traditional baked goods show up every year, the Dorcas women try to address the public's demand for certain goods. Last year, the "happy accident" was a lemon peach jelly, which proved popular again this year, as it flew off our little shelf.

I did get a chance to wander a bit this year, and sat and talked with Ruth and Teivy, two of the oldest Dorcas members, as they sold chances on the quilt. The Dorcas members raffle a quilt every year: this year, the wife of the former minister at Tory Hill quilted a twin-sized piece that used all Civil War era reproduction fabric. Done in browns, it was quite nice—the perfect size for a throw. They actually had another quilt donated to them, so they will be selling chances on that this fall.

Back to Ruth and Teivy. Both in their eighties, they are the oldest active members of the Dorcas Society. I've had the chance to chat with Ruth, and find her a delight: not only did she offer her unique perspective on Dorcas, but it turns out she went to college with my grandfather. Teivy makes the homemade donuts every year for the Fair, and I have to admit that I woke this morning, sat up in bed, stomach growling, and I immediately thought of Teivy's donuts with anticipation.

The Fair is now held the same day as the Community Fair, which, in my youth, was called Old Home Days. Across Route 202, in the local baseball field, a tiny midway is set up with games and booths, with entertainment on the hour. I've not made it to that part of the fair since the two organizations started holding events on the same day, but it looks like it did in my childhood, and I think appeals to the families on a broader scale.

While the Dorcas members offer space to some crafters at the Fair, most of the booths are community organizations that are raising funds for historical societies, cemeteries, churches, and libraries. There is also always the Revolutionary War Re-enactors [the Royal Irish Artillery] camped out in the little central square where Route 112 and Route 202 meet. They open the Fair every year with the loud boom of their cannon, which they then set off hourly throughout the day. It's always intriguing to see them in their Revolutionary wardrobe mingle with the Dorcas members, dressed for a turn of the twentieth century garden party (or some approximation of that).

This year, the Brewster Mansion marked its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Bev and Sandy Atkinson offered tours of the house for a small fee. Part of the Fair



happens in the barn at the Brewster Mansion, where the Atkinson's sell their silver, and other village improvement organizations like the historical society set up booths inside out of the heat. This year, area artist Bonnie Doughty was signing prints of a painting she did of a local landmark to raise funds for the cemetery.<sup>465</sup>

This is the Dorcas Fair of this century, as described in my own ethnographic field notes from the Fair in 2005 and prior to my analysis of Wiggin's thick description. While there are key markers in both Wiggin's description of the event and my own that delineate their specific cultural eras, the similarities between the two are all the more striking for the aberrations. Since 1902, with few interruptions, the Dorcas Society of Buxton and Hollis has hosted its annual Fair and Garden Party as a way to celebrate the community and raise funds for public works. And while the goals and mission of the Dorcas Society as enacted during the Dorcas Fair remain the same as the initial purposes, the Fair also serves as a site of selective cultural memory, a performance matrix of times and local histories that offer radically different experiences for those involved.

Arising out of a women's club movement that reached its peaked in the early part of the century and quickly dwindled following, the rarity of the Dorcas Society's continuance points to its embeddedness in the community. This is due, in part, to the organization's ability to offer a site of nostalgic performance of the past. This nostalgic performance and its collective memory-making are possible in large part through the unconscious construction of what performance studies and theatrical scholar Kimberly Tony Korol-Evans has so aptly outlined as an intrastice, moving Victor Turner's work into the twenty-first century by pushing beyond the liminal

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<sup>465</sup> All of the text in this section and description of the event are from field notes I wrote of my personal experience, as well as from conversations with others involved.

“state between,” to the “state within” so that those who cross the threshold that for Turner was “neither here nor there, neither now nor then” instead experience a “state of both here and there, both now and then.”<sup>466</sup> The Dorcas Society’s continuance is in many ways ritualistic, but it is certain that there is never a void or ‘state between’; they are firmly entrenched ‘within’, with one foot in the turn of the twenty-first century, while the other lingers somewhere in the vicinity of the turn of the previous century.

The pivotal entry-point to analysis of the Dorcas Fair lies not in the here and there, which in effect remains the same three square miles or so of geography, but in the then and now and the simultaneity of its performance in this context. Over time, however, the community which the Dorcas Society supports has seen both a remarkable amount of social stability and a remarkable amount of dynamic change. At the time of the Dorcas Society’s inception, for example, the town of Hollis had just over 1000 residents, and its sister community across the Saco River (Buxton) had approximately 1800—with numbers decreasing over the next two censuses as the men and young adults left the towns seeking opportunity.<sup>467</sup> However, starting with the 1980 census, the area has seen an enormous growth rate given its small size: by the 2000 census, Hollis had gained over 1300 inhabitants. While I am unable to go into the in-group and out-group dynamics that are so unique to the Maine way of life in this work, I believe it is sufficient to say that the influx of people “from away”—a common phrasing in Maine used to denote those who were not born in the state and

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<sup>466</sup> Kimberly Tony Korol-Evans, *Renaissance Festival: The “Merrying” of Past and Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, forthcoming).

<sup>467</sup> Buxton, Maine Comprehensive Plan, 2003. Accessed online at [www.buxton.me.us/comprehensive\\_plan](http://www.buxton.me.us/comprehensive_plan) Accessed 24 June 2005.

who do not have historical and social ties to their new communities—has caused friction and unease that can be read in the Dorcas Society’s hearkening to the past. While more current Census data is not available, the town’s annual report for July 2003 to June 2004 states that “there were 50 new homes started this year, with a value for all construction, including garages, additions and renovations of \$7,895,250.”<sup>468</sup> Given that most of these homes are single family dwellings, with a mean household size of 2.73, the impact on the population for a town this size will be dynamic.<sup>469</sup> This impact is most profound on the remaining large tracts of land that have, until now, stayed within families for generations.

Large acreage family farms are slowly being parceled into subdivisions: property values in Southern Maine have skyrocketed as the area has become known as a “bedroom community” for professionals commuting up to two hours each way to jobs in the Boston area, and who are willing to pay large sums of money to escape the city environment and overpriced housing market in favor of the peace and quiet of rural communities with strong school districts. In conjunction, many of the older farming families have found it necessary to sell to these buyers, because the income from the land is unable to help them meet the struggle simply to pay the taxes on the property. In addition, demand for middle to lower income property has increased in the area in order to provide housing for employees of the recently opened Poland Spring Water bottling plant. This influx of new blood into a community that still

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<sup>468</sup> Town of Hollis 2004 Annual Report. Online at [www.hollismaine.org](http://www.hollismaine.org) Accessed 24 June 2005. page 15 or 16.

<sup>469</sup> Buxton, Maine Comprehensive Plan, 2003. Online at [www.buxton.me.us/comprehensive\\_plan](http://www.buxton.me.us/comprehensive_plan) . Accessed 24 June 2005.

adheres to the mentality of village life has caused tension within a culture known for its reticence—particularly toward those “from away.”

This tension and fluctuation in the culture’s shared identity is played out on the community stage on an annual basis. Intriguingly, the backdrop for the town’s current self-exploration is painted by Wiggin’s stories and philanthropic work, particularly through her sentimental and nostalgic views of the area and its people. Shannon Jackson points out in *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity*, “the productivity of nostalgia lies in what it erases from memory as much as in what it retains, the idealized and selective vision of ‘apple dowdy and mulled cider’ substituted for the ‘colonial days,’ representing only that which induced longing in the visitor.”<sup>470</sup> By placing the past in the present and the present in the past in the simultaneity of the intrastice, the Dorcas Society produces a nostalgic performance that idealizes its past through generalized markers much like those that substitute for the “colonial days” to which Jackson refers.

Wiggin refers to her home in Hollis as “the most idyllic place for work ever known” while simultaneously serving as “a center of village improvement, a beacon of light on the countryside.”<sup>471</sup> The group of women who live in that community today struggle to maintain a nostalgic notion of their town as an “idyllic place” despite the friction caused by attempting to align their current community identity with its image in Wiggin’s writings. The organization has changed little in its century-long existence; the women of today’s Dorcas Society continue to provide charitable assistance to the community via scholarships to local high school students,

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<sup>470</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 266-267.

<sup>471</sup> Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 355.

“Christmas baskets and donations to families in need; donations to various organizations, including the American Red Cross [whom Wiggin arduously supported during World War I], the Salvation Army, Opportunity Farm, York County Shelter for Abused Women, the Ronald McDonald House, the Buxton Rescue Unit, Day One, and the Visiting Nurse Service, as well as local churches and libraries.”<sup>472</sup> While some of the organizations receiving aid from the Dorcas Society have changed through the years, the original intent of the founding members, to encourage the “literary, musical, charitable, social, religious and benevolent work” in the area, is still evident.<sup>473</sup>

At the Dorcas Fair and Garden Party, whose proceeds go generally to community betterment via the previously discussed organizations, and more specifically to scholarship funds and maintaining the Community Parish House, the women of the Dorcas society strive to provide that “beacon of light” around which the community can coalesce by performing their nostalgic past at the fair. At the Fair, the women supervise booths of baked goods, antiques, and crafts, still dressed in the long skirts and aprons of a bygone era. The choice in costuming is meant to reflect Wiggin’s influence on their work, and therefore the town. However, the Dorcas society chooses to leave the “specific” bygone era up to the participants, so the result is not a precise reflection of the historical past, but rather a nostalgic sense of “past” that represents the women and the town on multiple levels. Indeed, with two costume historians and antique clothing collectors as part of the organization, the women are able to represent New England village clothing from the Civil War to the

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<sup>472</sup> *A Little Book of Dorcas Dishes: 2005-2006 18-Month Calendar.*

<sup>473</sup> Constitution and By-Laws of the Dorcas Society. Courtesy of the Quillcote Collection. Held privately by William and Carla Turner. Hollis, Maine.

current day—and have often chosen to include an historical costume pageant as part of the day’s events.

The climax of the Dorcas Fair often includes the women performing Wiggin’s songs, stories and letters, and reminding the community of their roots as Wiggin remembered them, before the “chastening had of time...laid somewhat heavily on the town.”<sup>474</sup> These various performances echo the “novelties” and other “ways of entertainment” that characterized the Fair in Wiggin’s time.<sup>475</sup> As an example, in 2001, Carla Turner, who currently owns Quillcote, took unpublished letters between Wiggin and her sister and created an hour-long performance piece that focused not only on the relationship between the two women, but on their summer life in Hollis. At the turn of this century, these women continue to reach back to a nostalgic history of the town and their place in it as remembered through the acts of self-expression rendered by Wiggin, both of herself and of the group of Dorcas women.

However, in recent years, in part due to the advanced age of many of its members, and the shifting constitution of the community itself, the women of the Dorcas Society have sought to reshape their image in the community—which, one member described has been as “the grand old ladies who live in the big white houses”—in order to make the organization more accessible to newer community members.<sup>476</sup> The major shift the Dorcas Society has made in that regard has been to merge the Fair and Garden Party with the larger Community Fair mentioned in my field notes, which does not have the same philanthropic philosophy, but brings in much larger crowds and therefore exposes more community members to the Dorcas

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<sup>474</sup> Wiggin, *The Old Peabody Pew*, 5.

<sup>475</sup> Wiggin, 389-390.

<sup>476</sup> Ethnographic field notes, June 2005.

Society's philanthropic work. Opinion among Dorcas members differs greatly as to whether this union of community events is having positive impact on the Dorcas Society or not; this is one of several sites of friction in the group's identity as it struggles to remain a vital part of the community in the twenty-first century.

The influx of new community members and the aging of the community as a whole provide an understandable context for the reinvigoration of civic events that serve to affirm community identity. By the 2000 census, the median age of the community had continued to rise. For example, according to the comprehensive plan for the town of Buxton as revised in 2003, both Buxton and Hollis saw significant increases in the median age of residents from the 1970 census to the 2000 census: the median age of Buxton residents rose from 25.0 to 36.4, while the median age of Hollis residents rose from 27.5 to 36.8.<sup>477</sup> This, coupled with data indicating that the number of residents under the age of twenty actually decreased between 1990 and 2000, indicates an increasingly elderly citizenship.

Creating a shared community identity for these two particular constituencies is problematic, for as Robert Archibald points out in *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community*, "civic, neighborhood, and familial life all depend up on shared places that are repositories of common memories and shared experiences."<sup>478</sup> Without these shared memories and experiences, creating a holistic community identity becomes problematic. By combining two historically identifiable events in a new context, the towns attempted to create those shared memories and experiences

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<sup>477</sup> U.S. Census data as reported in the 2003 revision of the Buxton, Maine, comprehensive plan. Originally available online at [http://www.buxton.me.us/comprehensive\\_plan/revision\\_2003/pages/chapter\\_03.htm](http://www.buxton.me.us/comprehensive_plan/revision_2003/pages/chapter_03.htm). Accessed 24 June 2005.

<sup>478</sup> Robert R. Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999), 17.

necessary to reshape their communal sense of self. However, this reformulation could not be accomplished without a certain degree of friction and dissonance in the reconstituted communal self.

Nowhere is this dissonance more evident than in the spatial relationships determined by the geography of Buxton Lower Corner. This intersection is in actuality a meeting point of several roads: Buxton Lower Corner is the convergence of the Narragansett Trail, River Road, Beech Plains Road, Woodman Road, and Old Orchard Road—a major intersection of thoroughfares. Historically, the Old Home Days celebrations were located primarily in the fields between the Narragansett Trail and the Beech Plains Road, with the culminating fireworks located across Narragansett Trail to the west. When the Dorcas Fair first moved to the intersection permanently in the 1920s, its primary sites were at the Brewster Mansion (then known as Crossways), located at the northern point of the intersection between Narragansett Trail and River Road, with performances held in the adjacent Tory Hill Meeting House which is situated between River Road and Woodman Road.

Despite the consolidation of the two separate community events into a single day's festivities, they remain geographical distinct. The Dorcas Fair is still centered on the grounds of the Meeting House and Brewster Mansion, while the Community Day celebrations continue to be focused between Narragansett Trail and Beech Plains Road. This geographical segregation allows the organizations to maintain a semblance of autonomy, allowing each to attempt to posit unified understandings of the community's identity while employing markedly different framing modes.



The Dorcas Society continues to frame their identity-affirming opportunities by employing a nostalgic sense of the past. Dressed in long skirts and aprons, the members of the group circulate around the Meeting House and Brewster Mansion grounds. While the costuming is not historically precise to any specific era, and indeed makes no attempt at historicity, the women become visual markers of the past and its presence (and persistence) in the contemporary community. Neither is this an opportunity for historical re-enactment for the Dorcas women: they make no attempt to portray a character or assume a role other than their own in the community at the present moment. Rather, they create their own traditions that are specific to the Fair in order to formulate a shared history. According to Eric Hobsbawm and T. Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition*, this “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>479</sup> For this group, it is enough to gather with their community and offer a representation of the past through their clothing and the homemade gifts and foodstuffs they make to sell at the Fair in order to ritually call the past into the present.

Yet, I argue that while the costumes the Dorcas ladies don may not hark back to a single, unified past or an historical moment, they frame the event as a generalized, nostalgic hearkening to a past. This nostalgic past, rather than unified within a chronologic, is unified by the intrastice—by being both past and present, then and now—and by making an emotional connection to an assumed quality or

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<sup>479</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

essence of a bygone era, leaving the specificity of the era unmarked. Further, by “ignoring” time as an organizational rubric, the Dorcas Fair allows for the possibility of re-inventing or reformulating the community context and community history. So, in a sense, the Dorcas Fair is an intrastacial site of selective cultural memory and community history “making,” a performance matrix of times and histories that consciously and unconsciously blend to create a fluid component of nostalgia.

While the women of the Dorcas Society circulate freely on the north and west side of the intersection, rarely do they cross out of their established domain. The fields of the sports park are the sole venue of the Community Days, and without even the visual allusion to the past, the citizens on this side of the intersection perceive the community in a context more solidly rooted in the events of the present. Bereft of the pageantry of civic drama, and the carnival midway that superseded the pageantry in the 1960s and 1970s, the focus of Buxton Community Days now rests on children, athletics, and clubs. The morning's events start with a 5k road race and a series of soccer exhibition matches that are focused on infusing the event (and by extension, the community) with a sense of family and multigenerational commingling. In addition, the Community Days organizers attempt to draw younger children into the communal experience by offering kid-friendly entertainment through simple games and activities like jumping castles. In addition, a growing number of social clubs and environmental groups have begun participating in the event as a way to provide information and create social awareness within the community.

These clubs provide a noteworthy link from the present into the future for the towns' collective identity, offering the citizens the opportunity to help create the

future identity of the community. Some of these booths offer the opportunity to invest in the towns' future generations by supporting the local Cub Scout troops or by buying raffle tickets from the high school's drama club so they can bring in a guest artist. Increasingly, however, organizations are using the Community Days celebration as a way to argue for increased protection and civic planning, in order to protect the rural way of life that is swiftly disappearing from the area. In 2007, local representatives from the Trust for Public Land had a considerable display of information and resources intended to focus community support for protecting a large tract of land along the Saco River, which separates the towns of Buxton and Hollis.

The collective community urge to protect this land from outside development is just another complexity of the identity formation of these towns, as it not only seeks to shape the future of the area environmentally, geographically, and socially, but also participates in its own mode of heritage and identity formation by inscribing those inhabitants already part of the community while excluding those who would continue to develop the area. Sonia Kuftenic succinctly summarizes the challenges that rural towns like Buxton and Hollis, Maine face in trying to maintain a shared communal identity: "The concept of community remains difficult to pin down, but depends in large part on borders of inclusion and exclusion. Community members define these borders in both perceptual and material ways, noting shared values, interests, and territories...."<sup>480</sup> As the Dorcas Fair and the Buxton Community Day continue to grow together on a shared location at a shared time, these shared moments

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<sup>480</sup> Sonia Kuftenic, "'Odakle Ste? (Where Are You From?): Active Learning and Community-Based Theatre in Former Yugoslavia and the US" *Theatre Topics* 7, no. 2 (1997): 178.

and identity construction may provide an exemplary context for studying the performative construction of a disappearing rural community identity.

Today's Dorcas Society does not have the benefit of calling upon Wiggin herself to perform or to read from manuscript as the Dorcas ladies of old did, and with the rescheduling of *The Old Peabody Pew* to December, the Dorcases have had to create additional entertainments to supplement their fair booths. Among these have been the fashion shows highlighting nineteenth century garments, performances of music written by Wiggin and her contemporaries, the previously mentioned staged adaptation of letters written between Kate and her sister Nora, found in Kate's old study at Quillcote. More recently, another autobiographical performance across time was enacted at the Tory Hill Meeting House as part of the Fair, continuing the connection between Charles Dickens and Wiggin. This connection is maintained by the Dorcas Society as "heirs" to the tradition and performances engendered by Wiggin, and by one of Dickens' own heirs. Gerald Dickens, the author's great-great grandson who has toured the U.S. performing Dickensian one-man shows, chose to end ten years of touring the U.S. at the Dorcas Fair in the summer of 2006. One of the shows he performs is an adaptation of Wiggin's *A Child's Journey with Dickens*, which he prefaces with Dickens's version of the tale. Gerald Dickens remarked not only about his admiration of Wiggin as a writer, but also as a philanthropist whose work continues to have impact in a community she held dear.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Gerald Dickens, *A Child's Journey with Dickens*, Hollis, Maine, 22 July 2006.

## Conclusion: “Slight Changes Ensure Perfection”<sup>482</sup>: Kate Douglas Wiggin and the Performance of Self

In *Composing a Life*, Mary Catherine Bateson refers to the creation of autobiography as “the process of improvisation that goes into composing a life” that is “fundamental to the human search for meaning.”<sup>483</sup> Other scholars of autobiographical theory also adopt different modes of performance as analogies and analytical entry points, including Patricia Meyer Spacks, who states “when one climbs upon a literary stage to perform the self, one chooses the costume, assumes the poses, that the audience of one’s own time—and oneself as audience—will recognize.”<sup>484</sup> More than a metaphor, issues of performance and the performative have enhanced the analytical vocabulary of autobiographical studies, and given scholars the necessary tools to examine the context of the autobiographical act that is integral to the content of it.

As seen throughout this work, Kate Douglas Wiggin spent much of her life composing the version of herself that she set before the public, attempting to ensure that her presentation of self was recognizable to her audience—and that it was one which she could accept as genuine. Wiggin concluded *My Garden of Memory* with a chapter that focused on the creation of the autobiography—a chapter that was

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<sup>482</sup> Nora Archibald Smith, Hollis, Maine, to Kate Douglas Wiggin, Harrow-on-the-Hill, England, n.d. Reprinted in Nora Archibald Smith’s *Kate Douglas Wiggin: As Her Sister Knew Her* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1925), 381.

<sup>483</sup> Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 34.

<sup>484</sup> Quoted in Martha Watson, *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 27.

completed just days before Wiggin's death.<sup>485</sup> She invoked the long tradition of autobiography, placing her own work within the canon, while simultaneously operating within the performance construct of middle-class femininity. Wiggin used James Branch Cabell's discussion of autobiography and authorship as a way to secure a place in the memory of the public and to acknowledge that authors "are not quite content to be put by, finished with forever...*for we will continue here in the world well known to us, if only as syllables; we would not be forgotten utterly.*"<sup>486</sup> Indeed, Wiggin worked arduously at the end of her life to ensure that she would not be forgotten, creating an persona that was a complete and coherent presentation of self that incorporated the different facets of her life.

In large part, the coherency Wiggin worked toward was dictated by an ideal of middle-class womanhood that was being supplanted by the concept of the independent New Woman, whose autonomy, education, and independence surpassed that of the women of Wiggin's era. As the conservative rendering of femininity melted into the wings, new performances of femininity took stage, and women like Wiggin, whose name was immediately recognizable worldwide during her era, quickly became footnotes to history. As the study of autobiography, performance, and memory intertwine around issues of self that serve to "satisfy our desire for story at the same time as they promise to give us *truths* (if not Truth), to provide meaning, identity, and possibly even order, in an otherwise incoherent, arbitrary, and often

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<sup>485</sup> Smith, 380-381.

<sup>486</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 436. Emphasis in original.

violent world,”<sup>487</sup> the study of nostalgic identity performance holds fascinating examples of the continued influence on society and culture of women like Kate Douglas Wiggin through organizations like the Dorcas Society, that “remain attached to formulas, symbols, and conventions, as well as to rites that must be repeated and reproduced, if we wish to preserve the beliefs which gave them birth.”<sup>488</sup> In the end, Wiggin’s performance of self provides the conventions necessary for at least one small town in Maine to preserve its heritage through a variety of performance contexts.

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<sup>487</sup> Sherrill Grace and Jerry Wasserman, eds. *Theatre and Autobiography: Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2006), 14.

<sup>488</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 120.

## Appendix

### A Chronology of Important Events in the Life of Kate Douglas Wiggin<sup>489</sup>

#### **1856**

September 28

Katharine Douglas Smith, the eldest daughter of Robert Noah and Helen Elizabeth Dyer Smith, is born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

#### **1860**

Nora Archibald Smith, the second born daughter of Robert and Helen Smith, is born. Robert Smith dies.

#### **1863**

Helen Smith remarries Dr. Albion Bradbury; they move to Hollis, Maine.

#### **1868**

Young Wiggin meets novelist Charles Dickens on a train from Portland to Boston. This encounter becomes the basis for several stories about their interaction, including the book *A Child's Journey with Dickens*.

#### **1869**

Wiggin attends the Gorham Female Seminary in Gorham, Maine, and takes prizes in elocution in school-wide competitions.

#### **1873**

Dr. Bradbury moves the family to Santa Barbara, California; Wiggin follows the family West after finishing school at the Abbot Academy in Andover, Massachusetts.

Wiggin is invited for an extended visit to San Francisco as the guest of noted opera singer Annie Louise Cary.

Upon returning to Santa Barbara after her stay with Cary, Wiggin performs in a number of amateur theatricals.

#### **1876**

Dr. Bradbury dies suddenly, leaving the family heavily mortgaged as the bubble bursts on the California land boom.

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<sup>489</sup> While Kate Douglas Wiggin did not adopt the Wiggin name until her marriage to Samuel Bradley Wiggin in 1881, she is referred to throughout this chronology by that name as it is the most constant public reference given to or by her.



Wiggin attempts to aid her mother in paying the bills; one successful venture is the accepted of “Half a Dozen Housekeepers” by *St. Nicholas Magazine*, to be published in 1878. The magazine pays Wiggin \$150.

### **1877**

Wiggin is encouraged to pursue kindergarten teacher training by philanthropist and advocate Caroline Severance. Wiggin is introduced to German educational theorist, Friedrich Froebel, and his philosophies on kindergarten education.

Severance asks Wiggin’s help in establishing a kindergarten training school in Los Angeles to be run by Emma Marwedel; Wiggin becomes one of Marwedel’s first students. After a nine-month training course, Wiggin returns to Santa Barbara and opens her private kindergarten, which she calls The Swallow’s Nest.

Wiggin continues to perform in amateur theatricals, now doing so to raise funds for the kindergarten movement.

### **1878**

Wiggin is asked to organize an experimental, free kindergarten in Tar Flat, one of the worst slums of San Francisco. The Silver Street Kindergarten is opened in large part due to money raised by New York philanthropist Felix Adler. Wiggin’s success gains fame, and her work is had as an example for others starting free kindergartens.

Wiggin begins lecturing and public speaking engagements to raise funds for the kindergarten movement.

### **1879**

Through Severance, Wiggin associates with the New England Transcendentalists, including Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Bronson Alcott; Wiggin attends the Concord School of Philosophy they hold in the summer.

### **1880**

Wiggin establishes the California Kindergarten Training School.

Annie Louise Cary performs again in San Francisco, and brings performers to visit Wiggin at the Silver Street Kindergarten. Among these performers is impresario Dion Boucicault, who offers Wiggin a position in his company. She refuses, and dedicates herself to her educational work.

### **1881**

Wiggin marries Samuel Bradley Wiggin, and retires from full-time teaching. Her sister, Nora, becomes superintendent of the California Kindergarten Training School, and oversees the Silver Street Kindergarten.

Wiggin spends more time with public speaking engagements to raise funds for both schools. She continues to deliver the culminating series of lectures for the Training School.

**1882**

Wiggin's *The Story of Patsy* is printed privately to raise funds for the kindergarten movement.

**1884**

Wiggin and her husband relocate to New York. Wiggin continues to travel to California to deliver her lectures.

**1885**

*Kindergarten Chimes* is published.

**1886**

Wiggin's *The Bird's Christmas Carol* is privately printed to raise funds for the kindergarten movement.

**1888**

*The Bird's Christmas Carol* is published by Houghton Mifflin Company, which becomes Wiggin's primary publication house.

**1889**

Wiggin's husband dies unexpectedly in New York while Wiggin is delivering her lectures in San Francisco.

*Summer in a Cañon* is published.

*The Story of Patsy* is published.

**1890**

Wiggin travels to Europe to recuperate from emotional and physical strain; this journey becomes an annual event, and inspires the *Penelope* series of books

Upon returning to the United States, Wiggin conceives and performs her musical lecture parody, *Bluebeard*.

*Timothy's Quest* is published.

*The Story Hour: A Book for the Home and the Kindergarten*, co-authored with her sister, is published.

**1891**

"A Cathedral Courtship" appears serially in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

**1892**

Wiggin begins her “semi-professional” readings, and begins receiving payment for her public speaking. The nature of her material and performance shifts from lecture to stage readings of her literary work.

*Children’s Rights* is published.

**1893**

*A Cathedral Courtship* is published with *Penelope’s English Experiences*.

*Polly Oliver’s Problem* is published.

Wiggin speaks on early childhood education and the kindergarten movement at the Women’s Pavilion as part of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois.

Wiggin and her family decide to spend the summer in Hollis, Maine. At the end of the summer, they engage the Carll House for the following summer. Wiggin will eventually buy out the Carll heirs, and the Carll House becomes Quillcote, her summer home and the site of much of her writing.

Wiggin begins staging readings to raise funds for the Tory Hill Meeting House.

**1894**

On her annual pilgrimage to England, Wiggin meets George C. Riggs. They begin a courtship.

**1895**

Wiggin and Riggs marry.

At the end of their summer in Maine, Wiggin reads the manuscripts of The “Village Watch-Tower,” “The Midnight Cry,” and “The Fore-Room Rug” to raise funds for the Tory Hill Meeting House. These manuscript readings of the work she completes while in residence at Quillcote become an annual community event.

*The Republic of Childhood* is published.

*The Village Watch-Tower* is published, and contains the title story, along with “The Midnight Cry,” “Tom o’ the Blueberry Plains,” “The Nooning Tree,” “The Fore-Room Rug,” and “A Village Stradivarius”.

**1896**

*Marm Lisa* is published.

*Nine Love Songs and a Carol* is published.

**1897**

*Penelope’s Progress* is published.

Wiggin, along with other women of the community, organizes The Dorcas Society of Buxton and Hollis, Maine.

### **1898**

*Penelope's Experiences in Scotland* is published.

### **1901**

*Penelope's Irish Experiences* is published.

"The Author's Reading at Bixby Corner" appears in *The Ladies' Home Journal*.

### **1902**

*Diary of a Goose Girl* is published.

*Half a Dozen Housekeepers* is published as a novel.

*Golden Numbers: A Book of Verse for Youth* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1903**

*Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* is published.

*Rose o' The River* is published.

*The Posy Ring* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1904**

Wiggin is awarded an honorary doctorate by Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine.

*The Affair at the Inn*, which she co-authors along with Charlotte Stewart (writing as Allan McAulay) and Jane and Mary Findlater.

### **1905**

Wiggin finally reaches an agreement with the Carll heirs over the purchase of Quillcote—except for the ell, which was bequeathed to Olive Bradish, a long-time boarder with the Carll's.

Wiggin converts Quillcote's barn into a performance space; it is used for concerts, community dances, meetings, and is the site of the annual Dorcas Fair.

### **1906**

The San Francisco earthquake hits; while the quake initially spares the Silver Street Kindergarten, it is completely destroyed in the fires of the aftermath.

*The Thanksgiving Retrospect* is published.

*The Fairy Ring* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1907**

*The New Chronicles of Rebecca* is published.

*The Old Peabody Pew* is published.

*Magic Casements: More Fairy Stories Every Child Should Know* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1908**

*Tales of Laughter: A Third Fairy Book* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1909**

Wiggin dramatizes *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* with the aid of Charlotte Thompson; the play is taken on out-of-town tryouts.

*Susanna and Sue* is published.

*The Arabian Nights* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

*Tales of Wonder Every Child Should Know* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1910**

*Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* opens at the Republic Theater in New York, and runs for over three hundred performances.

*Pinafore Palace: A Book of Rhymes for the Nursery* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

### **1911**

*Mother Carey's Chickens* is published.

*Robinetta*, co-authored with the Findlaters and Allan McAulay, is published.

*Love By Express*, originally written in 1874, is published under the pseudonym Genevieve Knight.

*Dorcas Dishes*, a cookbook with an introduction by Wiggin, is privately printed as a fundraiser for the Dorcas Society.

### **1912**

Wiggin gives "A Child's Journey with Dickens" as a speech at a banquet in honor of Dicken's centenary.

The dramatization of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* is given a second company, which tours the United States.

The dramatization of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* opens in London with the original cast. Reviews are mixed, and the play runs only six weeks.

*A Child's Journey with Dickens* is published.

### **1913**

*The Story of Waitstill Baxter* is published.

**1914**

Wiggin adapts *The Bird's Christmas Carol* for the stage with the aid of Helen Ingersoll. It is written specifically for amateur performance.

*Bluebeard: A Musical Fantasy* is published.

**1915**

*Penelope's Postscripts* is published.

**1916**

*The Romance of a Christmas Card* is published.

Wiggin adapts *The Old Peabody Pew* to the stage as a fundraiser for the Dorcas Society. It is performed at the Tory Hill Meeting house by Dorcas members.

**1917**

Wiggin dramatizes *Mother Carey's Chickens* with the aid of Rachel Crothers. It opens in New York at the Cort Theatre, but runs for only 39 performances.

Mary Pickford stars in the Paramount Films production of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.

**1919**

*Ladies in Waiting* published.

**1921**

Wiggin's mother dies.

Wiggin and her sister begin preparing the materials for her autobiography.

**1922**

*The Talking Beasts: A Book of Fable Wisdom* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

**1923**

Wiggin makes arrangements with Bowdoin College to hold her official archive. She becomes the first president of The Society of Bowdoin Women.

After a brief illness, Wiggin dies in Harrow-on-the-Hill, England, on 24 August. Just prior to her death, she had sent her sister the final chapters of her autobiography.

Wiggin's autobiography, *My Garden of Memory*, is published.

*The Scottish Chiefs* is edited by Wiggin and Smith and published.

**1924**

*The Quilt of Happiness, Creeping Jenny and Other New England Stories*, and *Love by Express* (published under Wiggin's name) are all published posthumously.

Wiggin's sister continues the tradition of hosting the annual Dorcas Fair and Garden Party at Quillcote.

**1925**

*Kate Douglas Wiggin, As Her Sister Knew Her*, by Nora Archibald Smith, is published.

George Riggs dies.

**1933**

Nora Archibald Smith dies.

The Dorcas Fair moves first to "Crossways," the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. L. T. Cummings; following World War II, the Fair relocates to the grounds of the Tory Hill Meeting House.

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